RUNNING TO END RIGGED ELECTIONS

The Nation.

ON THE MOVE

NEW PROGRESSIVE IDEAS & LEADERS

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JUNE 26, 2006
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LETTERS

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

'THE ISRAEL LOBBY' IN LIGHT OF DAY

Garibaldi Highlands, British Columbia

■ I have admired and periodically read your publication for many years. Over the past five years it has distinguished itself as one of the few publications that have boldly grasped the gravity of the current crisis in which the United States finds itself and had the guts to speak out on a whole range of issues. Indeed, it has helped me retroactively to revise some of my understandings of US history.

I felt formally compelled to officially subscribe today as a gesture of support and especially out of admiration and respect for Philip Weiss's article on Mearsheimer and Walt's study of AIPAC and its influence on American policy and politics ["Ferment Over 'The Israel Lobby,'" May 15]. It was an honest and brave assessment, rarely found in the US press these days. GRAHAM E. FULLER

Former vice chair
National Intelligence Council, CIA

New York City

■ When he interviewed me for his article on the infamous Mearsheimer-Walt paper, I told my friend Philip Weiss that America would benefit from candid conversations about the pro-Israel lobby in the public sphere. But I also said that if academics are going to venture into this explosive territory, they should be "very careful" to get their facts straight and avoid using simplistic generalizations to sum up very complex events and trends. Mearsheimer and Walt did neither.

As an activist for Israel's peace camp who has been skirmishing with the conventional Israel lobby for decades, I would have welcomed an informed, scrupulously documented and honest critique of that lobby by two distinguished scholars. What I read was an elaborate attack ad that was riddled with so many inaccuracies, omissions and unsubstantiated assertions that, as Michelle Goldberg put it in *Salon*, "it seemed expressly designed to elicit exactly the [hostile] reaction it has received. The power of the Israel lobby is something that deserves a full and fearless airing, but this paper could make such an airing less, not more, likely." Readers should check out Goldberg's piece at www.salon.com/news/feature/2006/04/18/lobby/print.html and an editorial in the *Forward* (http://forward.com/main/article.php?ref=200603231251) for a sample of the paper's bad scholarship and slipshod reasoning.

Right-wing American Jews were infuriated by this paper. I was deeply disappointed. These scholars had an opportunity to give people who are inhibited about criticizing Israel some lucid arguments and facts to help them overcome those inhibitions. They blew it. Weiss notes that "Mearsheimer and Walt at times were simplistic and shrill. But it may have required such rhetoric to break through the cinder block and get attention for their ideas. Democracy depends on free exchange, and free exchange means not always having to be careful." Does he believe it doesn't matter if two important academics slip and slide around the truth—and alienate the very people they should be trying to educate—as long as they are able to raise a controversial issue? I think it matters very much. DAN FLESHLER

Rochester, Minn.

■ Philip Weiss fails to identify a key factor now weakening the position of the Israel Lobby. As long as the Soviet Union existed, Israel was a valued strategic ally. Someone maintained decades ago that if the United States and the Soviet Union got into a war, Soviet forces in the Mediterranean would have a very brief and very eventful life: Israeli forces would make short work of them. With the USSR out of the picture, the strategic argument for standing by Israel is weaker. Americans sympathetic to Israel now have to depend mainly on ideological arguments like "plucky little Israel" is facing a sinister coalition of oil-rich Islamic powers, Israeli citizens are largely descended from Americans and Europeans, etc.

But the tide of opinion may be shifting. Many Americans may join Mearsheimer, Walt and Weiss in hoping that weaker support for Israel will give our country some protection from terrorism. That may be a vain hope. As the richest and most powerful nation on earth, the United States is too handy a target for demonization. Moreover, we will probably remain committed to the basic existence of Israel. This will infuriate Israel's enemies at the same time that our shift away from total support may embolden Israel's antagonists. THOMAS ROBBINS

'THE ISRAEL LOBBY'—PART II

Ukiah, Calif.

■ "AIPAC's Complaint," Eric Alterman's take on the Mearsheimer-Walt paper ["The Liberal Media," May 1] is typical of the way liberals have responded to its damning evidence of the Israel lobby's pernicious influence on US Middle East policy. They praise the authors for raising the issue and then attempt to discredit key elements of their thesis.

Alterman accuses the authors of treating the American Jewish community as a monolith. Not so. They are referring to the organized Jewish community, which indeed, in its support for the Iraq War, was virtually monolithic. The fact that a handful of the scores of Jewish organizations were aggressively so, while others were relatively passive, does not change that fact. Again, in calling for a US confrontation with Iran, the more than fifty organizations in the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish American Organizations have shown the same unanimity.

Second, while Alterman acknowledges that the "power of oil to determine the course of US foreign policy, like most things, is not what it once was," he fails to acknowledge that despite their recent windfall profits, the oil companies did not support the Iraq War, for the simple reason that the flow of oil from the Gulf requires a stability that no longer can be guaranteed. It is threatened further by the prospect of a US attack on Iran.

Third, Alterman's comparison of AIPAC with the National Rifle Association and the pharmaceutical lobbies is also out of place, since one is lobbying for a foreign country and the other two are domestic lobbies. While the NRA is one of the few lobbies that, like AIPAC, maintain a potent grassroots operation spread across the country, the issues pushed by both cannot be compared in scale. When the Israel lobby has gone head to head with the pharmaceutical lobby over Israel's right to export generic versions of drugs to the United States, the Israel lobby has triumphed.

Finally, while writing that the weaknesses of the Mearsheimer-Walt paper "will hinder the authors' attempt to pierce the wall of ignorance and intimidation erected around such policy debates by the very institutions upon which it seeks to shed light," Alterman acknowledges that AIPAC is pushing for a war on Iran and that it is apparently going to get its wish. Since there is no other lobby advocating an attack on Iran, this would ultimately vindicate Mearsheimer and Walt's thesis. Should it come to pass, the world will pay a heavy price for having allowed the Israel lobby problem to be buried for so long. JEFFREY BLANKFORT

FBI SNOOPS & THE ANDERSON FILES

Washington, DC

■ Thank you for Eric Alterman's fine column "Bush's Other War" ["The Liberal Media," May 15], opposing the FBI's heavy-handed effort to rummage through decades-old historical archives donated to my university (George Washington) by the late investigative columnist Jack Anderson.

As the scholar who persuaded Anderson to make his papers available to the public, I can tell you with certainty that nothing would have upset him more than the thought of the government rifling through his files and censoring them, as two FBI agents told

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PRINTED JUNE 7 VOLUME 282, NUMBER 25

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EDITORIALS

On the Move

The Democratic Party leaders in Washington continue to stumble about looking for a coherent message. But the message from the grassroots is getting louder and clearer: Democratic voters want to fight the 2006 Congressional elections as a progressive party that promises the country a course correction—out of the quagmire that is Iraq, out of the swamp of corruption and incompetence that is Republican Washington and, as described elsewhere in this issue, toward a renewed and real politics of the common good.

Signs of such sentiments are coming from all corners of the country, especially Connecticut, where antiwar progressive Ned Lamont is mounting a strong primary challenge to Senator Joe Lieberman, George W. Bush's favorite Democrat. When Democratic town committees across Connecticut began early this year to object to Lieberman's pro-Administration stands, the Senator and his supporters dismissed it as little more than reflexive venting by left-wingers with no place else to go. Then Lamont won twice the number of votes he needed at the state Democratic convention to secure a place on the August 8 primary ballot, and shortly thereafter received endorsements from the activist groups Democracy for America and MoveOn.org. Suddenly, observed *Hartford Courant* columnist Kevin Rennie, "The political world outside Connecticut has woken to the news that Sen. Joseph I. Lieberman faces a serious challenger." As usual, the last ones to get the word were party strategists and political pundits in Washington."The Beltway bloviators don't believe that parties at home would dump a Washington favorite like Lieberman," Rennie explained.

The Lamont challenge is not an isolated incident; it's part of a national phenomenon. At a time when a new CBS News poll finds that eight out of ten Democrats now believe the United States should have stayed out of Iraq and more than three out of five Democrats want US troops home as soon as possible, antiwar candidates who entered primaries as underdogs are doing better than anyone expected they would, and sometimes winning. Consider the June 6 results from Montana, where war critic Jon Tester upset all predictions to win a landslide victory in the US Senate primary over the Democratic Leadership Council's pick for a seat the Democrats hope to win in November; or from Iowa's First Congressional District, where union-backed lawyer Bruce Braley, attacked by his opponent for being too aggressive in opposing the war, prevailed in the primary for a critical open seat.

In New York, where Senator Hillary Clinton's re-election race is shaping up as a test run for an expected 2008 presidential campaign, the Senator found at her own state convention that she could not dictate policy regarding the war. The convention passed a resolution labeling the decision to go to war an "error" and urging a "safe and orderly withdrawal of US forces"—positions promoted by labor activist Jonathan Tasini, who plans to challenge Clinton if he can gather the 15,000 signatures needed to force a September primary.

Even if challenges to entrenched incumbents fall short—as was the case with California's Marcy Winograd, who lost after a fierce primary battle against veteran House member Jane Harman in an LA district—they are forcing the Democratic strategists to recognize the depth of the antiwar sentiment, as are the victories of candidates like Tester and Braley. Senator Russ Feingold made that point when he told the New Hampshire Democratic convention recently, "Some say 'We've got it made...let's not rock the boat.' But I believe that's exactly how we lost in 2002 and 2004."

This is a time for conviction, not caution.

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COMMENT

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The Nation (ISSN 0027-8378) is published weekly (except for the second week in January, and biweekly the third week of July through the second week of September) by The Nation Company, L.P. © 2006 in the U.S.A. by The Nation Company, L.P., 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003. (212) 209-5400. Washington Bureau: Suite 308, 110 Maryland Avenue N.E., Washington, DC 20002. (202) 546-2239. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Subscription orders, changes of address and all subscription inquiries: The Nation, PO Box 55149, Boulder, CO 80322-5149, or call 1-800-333-8536. Publications Mail Agreement No: 40041477. Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to Circulation Dept. or DPGM, 4960-2 Walker Road, Windsor, ON N9A 6J3. **When ordering a subscription, please allow 4-6 weeks for receipt of your first issue and for all subscription transactions.** Back issues $4 prepaid ($6 foreign) from: The Nation, 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003. The Nation is available on microfilm from: University Microfilms, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Member, Audit Bureau of Circulations. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Nation, PO Box 55149, Boulder, CO 80322-5149. Printed in U.S.A. on recycled paper.

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Fighting for a Fair Vote

No one who paid close attention to the last two presidential elections can doubt that, come election time, secretaries of state play pivotal, sometimes defining, roles. Though most Americans would be hard-pressed to name the holder of the office that manages elections in their home state, after 2000 everyone knew that Secretary of State Katherine Harris was in charge of deciding who voted and whose votes counted in Florida. And after 2004 everyone knew that Secretary of State Ken Blackwell was doing similar duty in Ohio. These two "down ballot" officials served as co-chairs for George W. Bush's campaign in their respective states, but the real "service" they performed for the Republican cause came in what critics have identified as their aggressive manipulation of voting registration standards, unequal distribution of voting machines, intimidation of prospective voters and meddling with recount procedures to favor Bush.

The Ohio voting and vote-counting debacles of 2004 so unsettled Mark Ritchie, who coordinated that year's nonpartisan National Voice voter-registration and -mobilization campaign, that the veteran activist decided to leave the sidelines and jump into the electoral fray. Ritchie left his job as president of the Minneapolis-based Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, one of the largest nonprofit organizations in the country promoting sustainable development and rural communities, and announced he would mount a Democratic challenge to Mary Kiffmeyer, Minnesota's Republican secretary of state, with whom he had sparred over voter registration and access to polling places. Recalling the work he'd done as head of the 2004 coalition that registered 5 million new voters, Ritchie said, "Although we were very successful, we had to overcome obstacles created by the secretary of state's offices in Ohio, Florida and right here in Minnesota. Through this experience it became clear to me that we could not have fully free and fair elections under our current secretary of state."

Ritchie is not the only prominent figure to make a career change in order to run for a post on a platform that promises to manage voting and elections—a task that in most of the country falls to elected secretaries of state—in a manner that helps rather than hinders democracy. Debra Bowen, a California state senator who as chair of the elections committee led the fight to force firms that produce high-tech voting machines—especially the controversial Diebold Corporation—to guarantee that their equipment is reliable and accurate, just won the Democratic nod for secretary of state. As the progressive San Francisco *Bay Guardian* observed in its endorsement of Bowen. "She's saying what few in politics want to openly admit: It's possible to rig elections with this gear, and there aren't enough safeguards to prevent fraud." In Ohio, Franklin County Common Pleas Court Judge Jennifer Brunner resigned her position to mount a campaign that pledges to end the politicization of the secretary of state's office that has characterized Blackwell's tenure. Brunner says she'll work to assure that vote counts can be audited and verified, to enforce laws against voter intimidation and to distribute new voting machines equally in order to break the pattern of favoring GOP-leaning suburbs while saddling cities and rural areas with inferior equipment.

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In Massachusetts, National Voting Rights Institute founder John Bonifaz, who led the legal fight for a full recount in Ohio two years ago, surprised political insiders by winning enough votes at this month's state Democratic convention to earn a place on the ballot for his against-the-odds Democratic primary challenge to veteran Secretary of State William Galvin. Urging voters to "elect a voting rights leader," Bonifaz accuses Galvin of failing to fight for common-sense election reforms, such as same-day voter registration and practices that encourage participation by citizens for whom English is not their first language. He says he wants to "create a model for free and fair elections for Massachusetts and for the nation."

What links the new crop of candidates for secretary of state posts is a determination to address rather than exploit the vulnerabilities of electoral systems and a faith that, by replacing predictable partisans with "champions for democracy," to borrow Ritchie's slogan in Minnesota, the oft-neglected office of secretary of state can be transformed into an activist position—much as New York's Eliot Spitzer remade the image and operations of the down-ballot position of state attorney general. Ritchie says that when he began pondering a run, he thought his opponent would be the Republican incumbent. After several months on the campaign trail, however, he says that the real fight is with "the cynicism and alienation" born of uncertainty about whether every vote counts and whether candidates who get the most votes will actually take office. "We've got to overcome that cynicism and alienation if we ever want to restore faith in democracy," says Ritchie. "That's something that the right secretaries of state can do, one state at a time, until ultimately we've created the pressure that's needed so that the whole country accepts that we must make elections free and fair."

JOHN NICHOLS

Bold Ballot Initiatives

SWEET VICTORIES

In the 1990s conservative strategists began to reshape the political landscape with an onslaught of ballot initiatives. State by state, Republicans employed this tactic to slash social programs and roll back rights—most notoriously, with the anti–gay marriage initiatives of 2004—while progressives remained largely on the defensive.

Now, thanks in large part to the efforts of the Ballot Initiative Strategy Center, progressive organizations are learning how to use ballot propositions to promote bold, innovative policy around the country. Launched five years ago, BISC provides state and national advocacy groups with key research and training in effective referendum strategies.

Although ballot initiatives may not be as sexy as high-profile candidate races, they are an important part of this year's midterm elections. In addition to paving the way for progressive policy strides, referendums can galvanize voters and increase turnout. According to University of Florida professor Daniel Smith, in the past twenty years of midterm elections, each ballot initiative increased turnout, on average, by 2 percentage points.

Here are our top four progressive ballot initiatives for 2006.

§ Minimum-wage increases in Arizona, Colorado, Missouri, Montana, Nevada and Ohio. Using progressives' first-ever multi-state ballot-initiative strategy, the drive for an increased minimum wage has the potential to win, even in so-called red states. Raising the minimum wage is a highly popular idea; in an April Pew survey, 83 percent of the public said they favored raising the federal minimum wage to $7.15 (only ten states have enacted a minimum wage at this rate or higher). If there's an issue that unites Americans across ideological and demographic lines, it's this one.

§ Renewable energy in Washington and California. In 2004 progressives in Colorado voted for a precedent-setting renewable energy policy (Ken Salazar credited the ballot initiative with turning out the young voters who helped him secure his Senate victory). Now Washington and California are following suit. These initiatives would require the states' largest electric companies to increase their use of renewable resources like wind, solar, biomass, geothermal and small hydro from less than 2 percent today to 15 to 25 percent in the coming years.

§ Fusion voting in Massachusetts. In New York fusion voting—which allows voters to choose the same candidate on any of several party lines—helped candidates from the progressive Working Families Party secure key posts in the state. Its passage could help bring about broader progressive leadership in the Bay State.

§ Stem cell research in Missouri. Both Republican biotech bosses and progressive grassroots activists are pushing hard to allow stem cell research to be conducted in Missouri. If successful, this life-saving proposition could set the precedent for the next progressive multi-state ballot initiative campaign.

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL AND SAM GRAHAM-FELSEN

The Pincer Strategy

Pincer: A movement in which two columns are driven, one on each side of an enemy stronghold, so as to be able to converge like the jaws of pincers to isolate and crush the stronghold.

Echoing calls from the left, Senator Arlen Specter recently announced plans to hold hearings on what he has described as the executive branch's blatant encroachment on Congressional authority. At the same time, the libertarian Cato Institute has issued a report condemning what its authors describe as the Bush Administration's ceaseless push for power and its disdain for constitutional limits. And the American Bar Association has just set up a bipartisan all-star legal panel to investigate whether George W. Bush is violating the Constitution by claiming the right to ignore laws passed by Congress. What's needed now is for those from different points on the political spectrum to cooperate to put effective checks and balances on the presidential power grab.

Bush's usurpations of constitutional powers have been so wide in scope that they've often been perceived as separate issues affecting distinct constituencies. Charlie Savage reported in the April 30 *Boston Globe* that Bush has claimed he can ignore more than 750 statutes, including "military rules and regulations, affirmative-action provisions, requirements that Congress be told about immigration services problems, 'whistleblower' protections for nuclear regulatory officials, and safeguards against political interference

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COMMENT

in federally funded research." Even those who regard torture, rendition, government secrecy, domestic spying and similar abuses as scandalous and reprehensible don't always grasp that they are all manifestations of the same defiance of constitutional principles. Indeed, we face a "stealth authoritarianism."

The Cato Institute's new report, *Power Surge: The Constitutional Record of George W. Bush*, represents a big step toward putting together the pieces. It identifies a whole slew of violations, including the denial of habeas corpus, the violation of international torture conventions, efforts to deny the right to a jury trial and the erosion of war powers restrictions. According to Cato, the Administration believes, "When we're at war, anything goes, and the president gets to decide when we're at war." This view of executive power, says the report, should "disturb people from across the political spectrum." Indeed, the Cato report is so compelling because it hews so closely to the basic critique made by Representative John Conyers in his House Judiciary Committee Democratic Staff report, *The Constitution in Crisis*, and by others in the peace and human rights movements. In words that might spill from the mouth of Cindy Sheehan or Scott Ritter, Cato concludes that we now have "a president who can launch wars at will, and who cannot be restrained from ordering the commission of war crimes, should he choose to do so."

Differences, of course, remain. The Cato report, for example, hails the Administration's battle against gun control. And there are still powerful sections of the right that accept the authoritarian view of the Administration and the Federalist Society that presidential authority must not be subject to checks and balances. But as Bush's support collapses even among conservatives, possibilities are opening for an alliance against constitutional usurpation. Earlier this year, former Democratic Vice President Al Gore initiated a promising courtship between progressive and conservative forces when he joined former Republican Congressman Bob Barr to express "our shared concern that America's Constitution is in grave danger." As Gore explained, "In spite of our differences over ideology and politics, we are in strong agreement that the American values we hold most dear have been placed at serious risk by the unprecedented claims of the Administration to a truly breathtaking expansion of executive power." Administration lawlessness also emerged as a theme in the "revolt" of retired senior military officials. Noting that the United States is already engaged in military action against Iran, retired Colonel Sam Gardiner told *Democracy Now!* on April 17, "It's a very serious question about the constitutional framework under which we are now conducting military operations in Iran."

In response, Specter is planning to call Bush Administration officials and independent constitutional authorities to a hearing this month. Specter says Bush's restrictive signing statements on the Patriot Act and the torture amendment constitute a "very blatant encroachment" on Congress's constitutional powers. The hearings will provide an opportunity for potential allies—ranging from the impeachment movement to anti-secrecy groups and from election campaigners to peace activists—to construct a common defense of the Constitution. This requires deepening today's nascent convergence into a "law and democracy" movement, and framing the efforts of diverse allies—protesters, civil liberties and human rights groups, military lawyers, legislators and others—in terms of the enforcement of constitutional principles. This alliance should be presented as pro-law, pro-Constitution and engaged in a long-term project of democratic restoration.

Such an alliance requires coordinated message building—framing debates in terms of common constitutional concerns. For example, the Iran debate can be broadened from questions of peace and security to address the limits of Bush's unilateral war powers authority. This effort could be advanced through building bipartisan support for Representative Peter DeFazio's resolution reminding the President that he cannot initiate military action against Iran without Congressional authorization.

At the grassroots level, such an alliance can make use of existing links between progressive and conservative constitutionalists, like those created by the local anti–Patriot Act initiatives, which passed resolutions in 407 communities in at least forty-three states. Grassroots activists could join to implement *Nation* editor Katrina vanden Heuvel's suggestion in a May 1 post on her Editor's Cut blog that "one way to 'nationalize' the 2006 election" would be to "demand that all candidates defend the Constitution."

At an elite level, influential figures like Gore and Barr might move beyond giving a speech here and there to forming a Constitutional Protection League, recruiting high-profile personalities to speak and organize on behalf of constitutional restoration. (A potential model is the Anti-Imperialist League, formed to fight US annexation of the Philippines. Notable members included Andrew Carnegie, Mark Twain, William James and Samuel Gompers.) Indeed, the key to such a strategy may be the interaction of grassroots and elite participants. Pressure from the grassroots can help mobilize the Gores and Barrs. Their leadership, in turn, can help galvanize mass support at the grassroots.

CALVIN TRILLIN

As the Republican Base Grows Restive, George Bush and Bill Frist Receive Some Marching Orders From Karl Rove & Co.

If we don't do something, the nuts say we'll rue it.
We need their support. So how to accrue it?
A ban on gay marriage would certainly do it.
We know that can't pass, but let's strongly pursue it.
It's all just a scam, and we all always knew it.
We think they're so dumb that they'll never see
through it.

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Such a strategy has the benefit of defining the issue not as Democrats versus Republicans but as defenders versus subverters of the Constitution. That will require an admission that many Democrats have previously acquiesced in Administration abuses and that Democrats in office have at times themselves overstepped the Constitution. Fortunately, the peace movement is outspoken on this topic, and Gore has acknowledged that "Democrats as well as Republicans in the Congress must share the blame" for inadequately protesting a "grossly unconstitutional program."

Ultimately, revitalization of the Constitution will depend on an aroused and mobilized public. That in turn will help—and if necessary force—Congress and the courts to take on their constitutional responsibilities for the oversight of government and the implementation of law. JEREMY BRECHER AND BRENDAN SMITH

Jeremy Brecher is a historian. Brendan Smith is a legal scholar and former Congressional staff member. With Jill Cutler they edited In the Name of Democracy: American War Crimes in Iraq and Beyond.

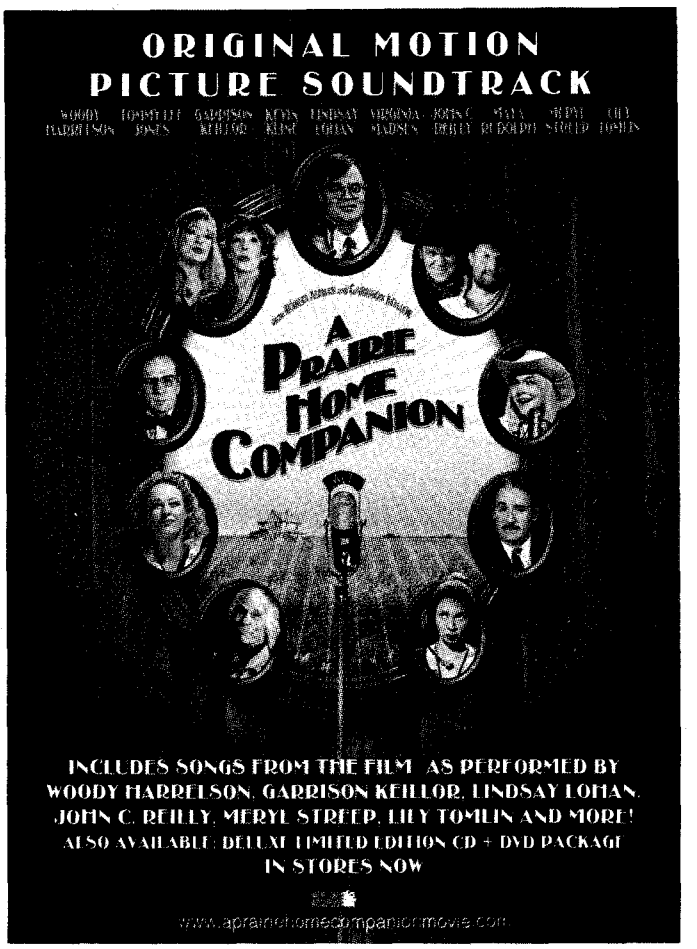
Progressive Values 101

It is an exaggeration to say that today's progressives don't have a philosophy. Progressives have a fairly consistent agenda—we know what we stand for. The problem is, we don't have an effective framework to communicate our philosophy to persuadable voters. Because a crucial election looms before us, progressive thinkers are rightfully focusing on this problem. But in fashioning a solution, we must insure that the language we use speaks to the Americans we are trying to persuade. This is a challenge, because most persuadable voters are not like us—they are normal people. Unlike us, they don't think much about public policy, they don't have a policy checklist for candidates and they don't speak policy or use intellectual jargon.

How do we persuade people who are so different? By assuring them that we share their values. "Values" need not be the anti-choice, anti-gay, anti-science mores of the right wing. In politics, they are ideals that describe the kind of society we are trying to build. There is a set of values that progressives can employ to frame public policy in language that will win over persuadable voters. And to those we are trying to reach, our values will sound very familiar: freedom, opportunity, security and responsibility.

What's so special about these rather moderate-sounding words? First, they resonate with all Americans. When we use these values to describe and defend progressive policies, voters understand that we're on their side. But more important, they summarize a progressive philosophy that voters can grasp and remember. Successful message framing isn't just repetition of preselected words and phrases. (Anybody remember how often Kerry said "values"?) The trick is using those words and phrases to communicate a coherent set of principles—a vision for the future.

We can begin by defining the proper roles of government. Progressive policies fit fairly well into three situations, where: (1) government has no proper role because public action would violate individual rights; (2) government acts as a referee between private, unequal interests; or (3) government acts to protect those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COMMENT

who cannot protect themselves, including future generations.

Where government has no proper role, the progressive value we should speak of is "freedom." The idea of freedom is deeply ingrained in American history. It is universally popular. Oddly, progressives rarely talk about freedom, perhaps because we are afraid that defending civil liberties makes us unpopular. But that's the point of values—to help us bridge the gap between popular ideals and policies that truly uphold them.

Where government acts as a referee, the progressive value is "opportunity." Americans believe in a land of opportunity where hard work is rewarded and everyone has equal access to the American Dream. Equal opportunity means a level playing field—fair dealings between the powerful and the less powerful, the elimination of discrimination and a quality education for all.

Where government acts as a protector, the progressive value is "security." Conservatives want to narrow the definition of security to mean only protection from domestic criminals and foreign terrorists. But Americans understand that protection of our health and well-being is also security. Insuring the sick and vulnerable, safeguarding the food we eat and products we use and preserving our environment are all essential to US security.

While progressives work to extend freedom, opportunity and security to all Americans, conservatives try to limit these rights to a select few. When conservatives restrict basic reproductive rights, authorize warrantless police searches and impose their creationist doctrine on schoolchildren, they are trampling on American freedoms. When they block antidiscrimination laws and traffic in government favors, no-bid contracts and economic development give-aways, they are crushing equal opportunity. When conservatives try to gut Social Security, dismantle programs that protect our health, safety and environment and grossly mishandle the terrorism threat, they are wrecking our security.

All this brings us to "responsibility," the value that most plainly sets progressives apart from conservatives. We take responsibility for the well-being of our nation by crafting policies to extend freedom, opportunity and security to all. Conservatives cynically turn the word inside out by chanting a mantra of "personal responsibility." They mean that unemployment, hunger and discrimination are the individual's problem, not society's. In this way, conservatives twist the language of responsibility to avoid responsibility. It's downright Orwellian.

So let's talk the talk: When advocating a public policy, let's emphasize freedom if government action would violate individual rights, opportunity if government should act as a referee and security if government should act as a protector. And let's point out that the progressive position takes responsibility for solving the problem, while the conservative position abdicates it. Here's a brief example: "America should truly be a land of opportunity. But the current minimum wage denies workers the opportunity to support a family. We have a responsibility to make the American Dream more than just a fantasy. Those who oppose raising the minimum wage are shirking that responsibility."

Polls consistently demonstrate that our policies are very popular. Americans want fair wages and benefits, consumer protections, quality education, a clean environment and healthcare for all. But many persuadable voters don't trust us to deliver these programs, because they don't understand our philosophy. Let's explain ourselves in language that voters will understand and appreciate. Let's make it clear that, for progressives, "values" is not just a buzzword. And, this time around, let's win. BERNIE HORN

Bernie Horn is the policy director at the Center for Policy Alternatives.

In Fact . . .

SOFT DRINKS, EMPTY PROMISES

■ Michele Simon, director of the Center for Informed Food Choices and author of the forthcoming *Appetite for Profit* (Nation Books), writes: The headlines certainly sounded impressive: COMPANIES PULLING SODAS OUT OF SCHOOL; BOTTLERS AGREE TO A SCHOOL BAN ON SWEET DRINKS. There's only one problem: It's not true. In May Big Cola announced yet another voluntary school sales policy, this one brokered by the Clinton Foundation. (The former President has made childhood obesity one of his causes.) The major media somehow missed that the deal is voluntary, meaning it's unenforceable. Moreover, diet soda full of artificial sweeteners, sports drinks high in sugar and other empty-calorie beverages with zero nutritional value are still allowed in high schools. Most disturbing, this PR stunt could undermine ongoing grassroots efforts to get this stuff out of schools. Clinton should work with parents and others fighting powerful corporations to get enforceable legislation. The last thing we need is Bill Clinton encouraging more empty promises from industry.

FEIFFER TO BE HUNG BY SVA

■ Jules Feiffer, a contributor of drawings, cartoons and covers to this magazine and well-known as a cartoonist, playwright and author, will be honored by the School of Visual Arts in New York City. The SVA will devote its next annual Masters Series to a retrospective of Feiffer's work. The show will be on view from October 24 through December 2 at the Visual Arts Museum.

ON THE WEB

■ The Colorado Rockies are playing faith-based baseball; other teams are wooing evangelicals with prayerful promotions. Something's going on here, Dave Zirin writes, but it has nothing to do with God. • Mayor Ray Nagin, who famously declared New Orleans a "chocolate city," begins his second term. Ned Sublette asks, What better time to appreciate how George Clinton, America's should-be poet laureate, has funked up politics? • Nomi Prins, author of *Jacked: How "Conservatives" Are Picking Your Pocket*, considers the inherent conflicts in Bush's choice of Goldman Sachs CEO Henry Paulson to be Treasury Secretary.

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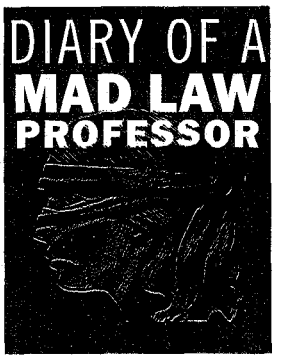
PATRICIA J. WILLIAMS

Borrowed Bodies



Last June Nicholas Minucci, a young white man, spotted Glenn Moore, an African-American man, walking down a street of Minucci's neighborhood of Howard Beach, Queens, an area that is generally described as "all white." Minucci leapt out of his car, accosted Moore and, employing a baseball bat he just happened to be armed with, beat Moore while spewing racial epithets, then stole his sneakers. Moore ended up with contusions on his body and two skull fractures.

Minucci's trial has just now come before a jury. That Minucci assaulted Moore is not the main issue in the case; rather, the question is whether Minucci's use of "the N word" makes this a hate crime as well, warranting a much longer sentence. As the New York *Daily News* headline put it, N-WORD TESTED AT FAT NICK TRIAL. (Yes, as though there weren't enough fun to go around, Minucci's nickname really is "Fat Nick.")

I will leave it to the jury to render its verdict in this matter. What intrigues me for the purposes of this column is what the public discussion of the case tells us about this cultural moment. To be fair, the case overflows with the kind of sordid detail and juicy drama that fairly begs for high tabloidization. The moment it was revealed that Minucci had a prior conviction for shooting a Sikh woman with a paintball gun while shouting "You fucking Indians, you killed our people," New Yorkers knew to brace themselves for a good 'un. The moment it was revealed that Moore admitted that he was in the neighborhood to steal cars but had changed his mind and was simply walking around in admiration, awed by the beautiful, well-kept homes—well, one knew this would get interesting.

And so it has. Race and class, cynicism and humiliation, this case has only the finest ingredients. Ethnic Italian versus African-American. Working-class thug versus underclass gangsta. Howard Beach versus the Badlands. Minucci calls black and Latino "pals" to the stand who say he's not racist. Glenn Moore claims transformation by having had the good fortune to gaze upon the pristine perfection of an ownership society.

On radio and TV, interesting theories of risk allocation have been invoked. Callers to morning chat shows claim that no sane black man would go into Howard Beach, therefore Moore deserved what he got. "If you know, do not go," said one caller who described himself as black. Presumptions of Moore's guilt have eclipsed any meaningful discussion of Minucci's vigilantism. Yes, yes, maybe Minucci could have called the police rather than "whacking" Moore, but Moore shouldn't have been there! OK, so Minucci's taking the sneakers was a little excessive, but Moore had *no* right to be there! Inside the courtroom, Minucci has been immersed in studies of the history of the N-word. He has armed himself with a copy of Harvard law professor Randall Kennedy's provocatively titled book *Nigger* and peruses it conspicuously while seated at counsel table, cracking his knuckles intermittently. In that book, Kennedy flatly claims that the word "nigger" has lost its sting, that it is just part of American idiom, that usage by hip-hop musicians and high-fiving basketball players has rendered it little more than the currency of facile badinage. Minucci likes this a-contextual take on the word; indeed, it is the cornerstone of his defense against the hate crime charge. Minucci just loves hip-hop and high-fiving and basketball to death—the bat notwithstanding. As a soulful born-again, neo-kinsman of Ludacris, he claims to have utilized the N-word's most casual and nonconfrontational connotation when inquiring if Mr. Moore might possibly have lost his way.

This is where it gets particularly interesting, I think. Minucci's defense seems to rest on a complicated kind of ventriloquism, or shape-shifting. He may have been an epithet-spewing white person beating up a dark-skinned victim with a baseball bat, but, forsooth, it's not a racial hate crime because he was really performing the assault as a pseudo-black-brotherly person. Minucci's assertion of this kind of malleable identity is marked not only by his attempt to align himself with what black speakers mean when they employ the N-word; it is also signaled by dress—the oversized basketball jerseys, the enormous sweatpants, the flat-brimmed, sideways-turned baseball cap in which he is most commonly pictured.

Moore, on the other hand, appears dressed for the yacht club. When he testified, he wore an outfit that consisted of a polo shirt, a dark blazer and khaki pants. Even so, the reportage of his appearance revealed complex fissures in how class and race are observed and by whom. The *New York Times* described Moore with "an earring gleaming in his left ear" and "slightly oversize clothing." The *Daily News*, on the other hand, described him as "neatly dressed."

Whatever is made of Moore's outfits, there is no such ambiguity when it comes to the characterization of Nicholas "Fat Nick" Minucci's predilections in haberdashery. He's into hip-hop. Wears "ghetto" gear. His stuff is blacker than the black guy's.

So here's what I wonder: As I follow this case, I peruse the newspapers. In the police blotter, I come across one or two or three cases a day of black teens or black young adults being charged with hate crimes for yelling things like "honky" or "white trash" while shoving, hitting, throwing stones and other clearly harmful and violent behavior. As in the Minucci case, this is important, because the charge of a hate crime can add years to a sentence for assault. Hence, I would like to know if there's a parallel defense available for black defendants who want to put a "white face" on their behavior. If Nicholas Minucci can claim "no hate intended" because he lives his life in blackface, would it work, do you think, for an industry of expert witnesses to show that hurled terms like "honky devil" and "white trash" are just hillbilly terms of endearment? Would it work, claiming that black defendants are just so immersed in imitating white hockey players or Ann Coulter that nothing more than good mimetic fun should be imputed? And would that "sincerest form of flattery" make us love one another better or hate one another more? ■

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ERIC ALTERMAN

Truth Is for 'Liberals'

Here we are, five and a half years into the Bush Administration, and the press corps still hasn't figured out how to handle the White House's primary tactic of media management: lying.

During George W. Bush's first term, reporters had a powerful confluence of motivations for their difficulty in calling the President to task. First was tradition; mere journalists lacked the authority to call a President a liar. Second, post-9/11 they were intimidated by Bush's McCarthyite with-us-or-ag'in-us rhetoric as well as that of a bloodthirsty right-wing punditocracy. (*New York Times* White House reporter Elisabeth Bumiller admitted that she and her colleagues found it "frightening to stand up there," and "no one wanted to get into an argument with the President at this very serious time.")

Finally, though much of what Bush said during his first term was laughable, it was not easily disprovable in a normative sense. Would the poor and the middle class be the primary beneficiaries of tax cuts designed almost exclusively to enrich the extremely wealthy? Could right-wing church groups and ideology factories replace the services provided by traditional government health and welfare agencies? Does abstinence-only education based on disinformation reduce teen pregnancy? Were WMD-infested, bin-Laden-loving Iraqis eager to be "liberated" by a power that instructs them that our God is bigger than their God? "Well maybe," replied most reporters. "Time will tell."

Because the mainstream media make a fetish of a particularly brainless form of objectivity, the Bush Administration has been able to deceive the American public on a dizzying array of issues, from war to economics to science to, well, you name it. Lying has usually damaged the Presidents who do it, as I argued in my book *When Presidents Lie: A History of Official Deception and Its Consequences.* But the media proved so timid in the face of this Administration's deceptions that the reckoning was delayed long enough for Bush to squeak into a second term.

Now the results are in—and reporters, under siege from several directions, are still trapped in self-eviscerating sanctimony. Jim Lehrer explained the peculiar form of "objectivity" he and his colleagues practice to *CJR Daily*'s Liz Cox Barrett not long ago: "I don't deal in terms like 'blatantly untrue,'" he averred. "That's for other people to decide.... I'm not in the judgment part of journalism. I'm in the reporting part of journalism." As Todd Gitlin pointed out on TPM Cafe, Lehrer's interview sounded an awful lot like Rob Corddry lecturing a befuddled Jon Stewart, "I don't have 'o-pin-i-ons.' I'm a reporter, Jon, and my job is to spend half the time repeating what one side says, and half the time repeating the other. Little thing called 'objectivity'—might wanna look it up someday."

Of course, even when they did catch Bush in the occasional bald-faced, easily demonstrable lie, most Washington journalists thought it gauche to make a big deal out of it. Dana Milbank wrote the classic 2002 *Washington Post* article about Bush's tendency to mislead, deliberately—all without ever using the "L" word. When asked by CNN's Howard "conflict of interest" Kurtz specifically about an incontrovertible lie by Bush about why we invaded Iraq—the President claimed that Saddam Hussein would not allow inspectors in—Milbank excused the liar: "This is just the President being the President." He meant it as a compliment.

Now Bush's lies are news again. When replacing his Treasury Secretary recently, he told another one that reporters have had trouble ignoring. Asked by Bloomberg's Richard Keil, "Has Treasury Secretary Snow given you any indication that he intends to leave his job anytime soon?" Bush responded, "No, he has not talked to me about resignation. I think he's doing a fine job." In fact, as Washington Post.com's Dan Froomkin reported, "Tony Snow (no relation) confirmed that Bush had offered John Snow's job to Goldman Sachs chairman Henry Paulson several days before the press conference, and the spokesman didn't deny that Bush and his treasury secretary had talked about it." Quizzed about the discrepancy, Tony Snow called Bush's response "artfully worded." By Bush Administration standards, that's sad but true.

Froomkin devoted a column to the incident, brazenly titled "Bush's Lie." In it he wondered at all the reasons reporters are reluctant to call a lie a lie. He quoted his own newspaper's coverage by Peter Baker and Paul Blustein, which gave no indication of the President's purposeful mendacity. "Bush, when asked about the Treasury secretary at his news conference last night, indicated only that he had not spoken directly with Snow and quickly changed the subject to positive economic indicators." In other words: "Thank you, sir, may I have another?" (Also writing about the incident, *Slate*'s John Dickerson explained, mystifyingly, "I'm reluctant to call it a lie, but the President abused our trust.")

Interestingly, Froomkin's attentiveness to the issue of what's true and what's false in the President's statements has earned him the reputation around the office of being an ideologue. Late last year *Washington Post* executive editor Len Downie spoke of his desire to "make sure people in the administration know that our news coverage by White House reporters is separate from what appears in Froomkin's column." National political editor John Harris admitted at the same time that he had "heard from Republicans" who thought Froomkin "unfair." To offer readers "balance," *Post* honchos demonstrated just what they consider to be the proper antidote to a twenty-year veteran reporter who submits Administration rhetoric to truth tests: In March they hired a 24-year-old former Bush/Cheney political operative named Ben Domenech, who had little (if any) experience as a journalist but plenty, it turned out, as a plagiarist.

So truth is for "liberals." Were it not for the fact that our democracy is being undermined by the liars in office, we might be flattered. But even the collapse of the President's popularity has not installed much backbone in the press corps. Bush can still lie about whatever he wants whenever he wants; treasury secretaries one day; war the next. It's "just the President being the President." ■

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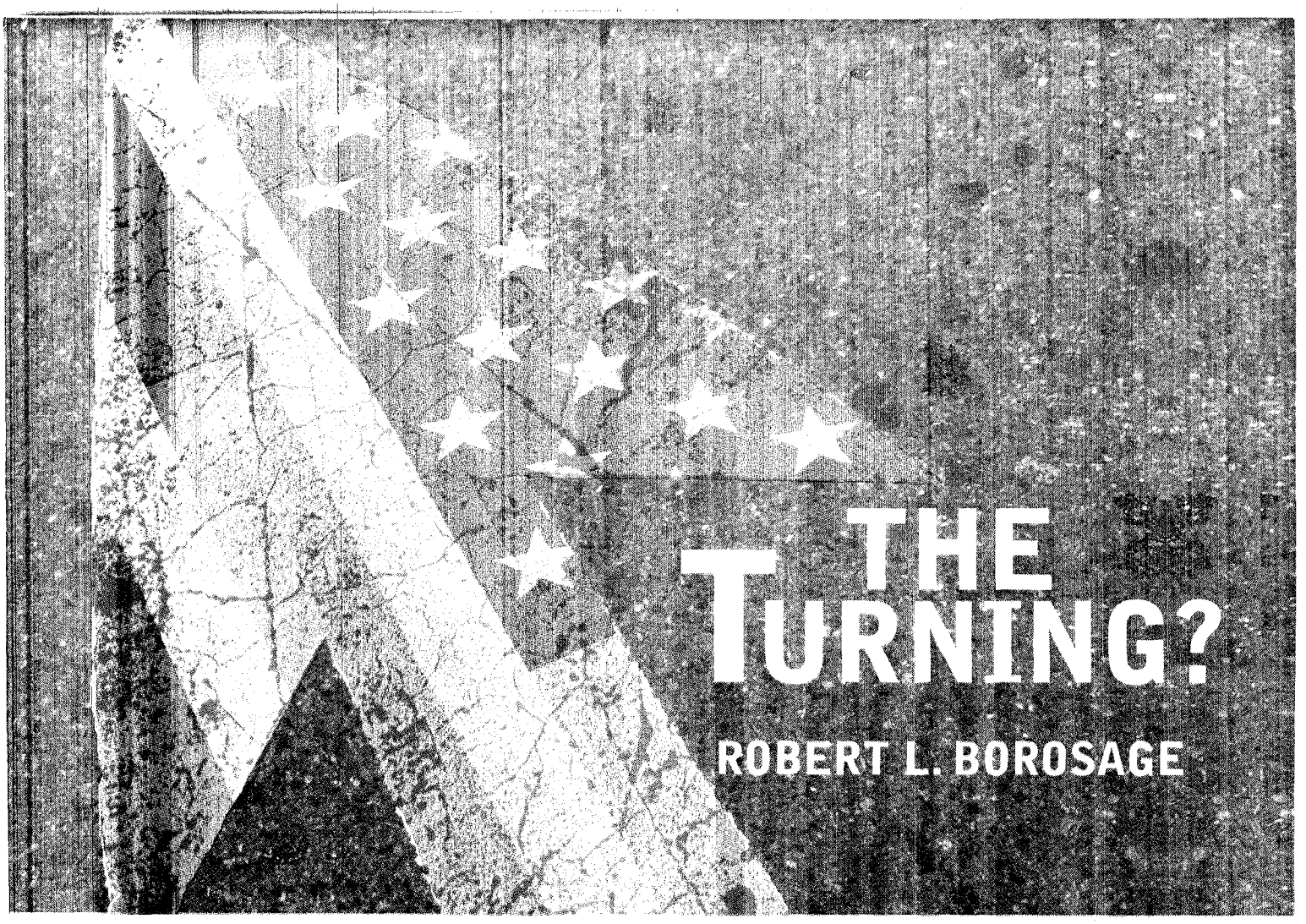

THE TURNING?

ROBERT L. BOROSAGE

What comes next? The catastrophic conservatism of George W. Bush and the DeLay Congress is collapsing. Americans have turned against the signature Bush initiatives: the war in Iraq, privatization of Social Security, trickle-down economics, the Big Oil energy policy. The GOP coalition is splintering. The religious right's extremism—Schiavo, stem cell research, attacks on science—alienates most Americans. The cynical posturing on immigration and gay marriage grows more transparent. DeLay is gone. Bush has moved from swagger to sorry.

Democrats are roused by the possibility of taking back the House and perhaps even the Senate this fall. But the stark failure of the right opens a far broader possibility, creating the space for a bold progressive vision and movement to challenge the grip that conservatives have had on our politics and imaginations over the past quarter-century. In this context, it's worth taking a sober look at the possibilities and limits of the coming election.

The Debate We Will Have

With nearly two-thirds of the country now disapproving of the performance of Bush and the GOP Congress, Democrats are tempted to start scoping out their new offices. Nothing could be more pernicious. When Democrats believe they are sitting on a lead, they turn from cautious to catatonic.

In fact, while the conditions for a political tsunami this fall are gathering, Republicans may still be able to survive the storm. Congressional seats are like impregnable medieval castles, populated with loyal subjects and defended with all the hot oil ads and dedicated troops that money can buy. Challengers have neither the time nor the resources for a long siege. Republicans will flood any close race with big money in the final weeks. Even with voters looking for a change, taking out any of these barons is a heroic feat; on average, 94 percent of House incumbents win re-election. Moreover, Americans still tend to scorn Congress but like their legislator; they think Congress is corrupt but that their Representative is clean. Democrats need only fifteen seats to win a majority in the House, where the rules, and the seniority of liberals, would enable even a small majority to produce a dramatic change. But it will take an extraordinary mobilization to get it done.

Democrats may have difficulties navigating the storm as well. They have no consensus position on the fundamental issue driving opinion—the war in Iraq—and aren't particularly compelling on how to fix the economy. Democrats rail at Bush's failures in Iraq, but they are all over the map on what to do going forward. House minority leader Nancy Pelosi has supported the old Marine Jack Murtha in calling for getting the troops out ("redeployment" is the euphemism du jour), while others—including pre-presidential candidates Hillary Clinton, Joe Biden, Evan Bayh and Mark Warner—argue that it is important to leave a stable government in place, although they are divided on how to achieve that. And some,

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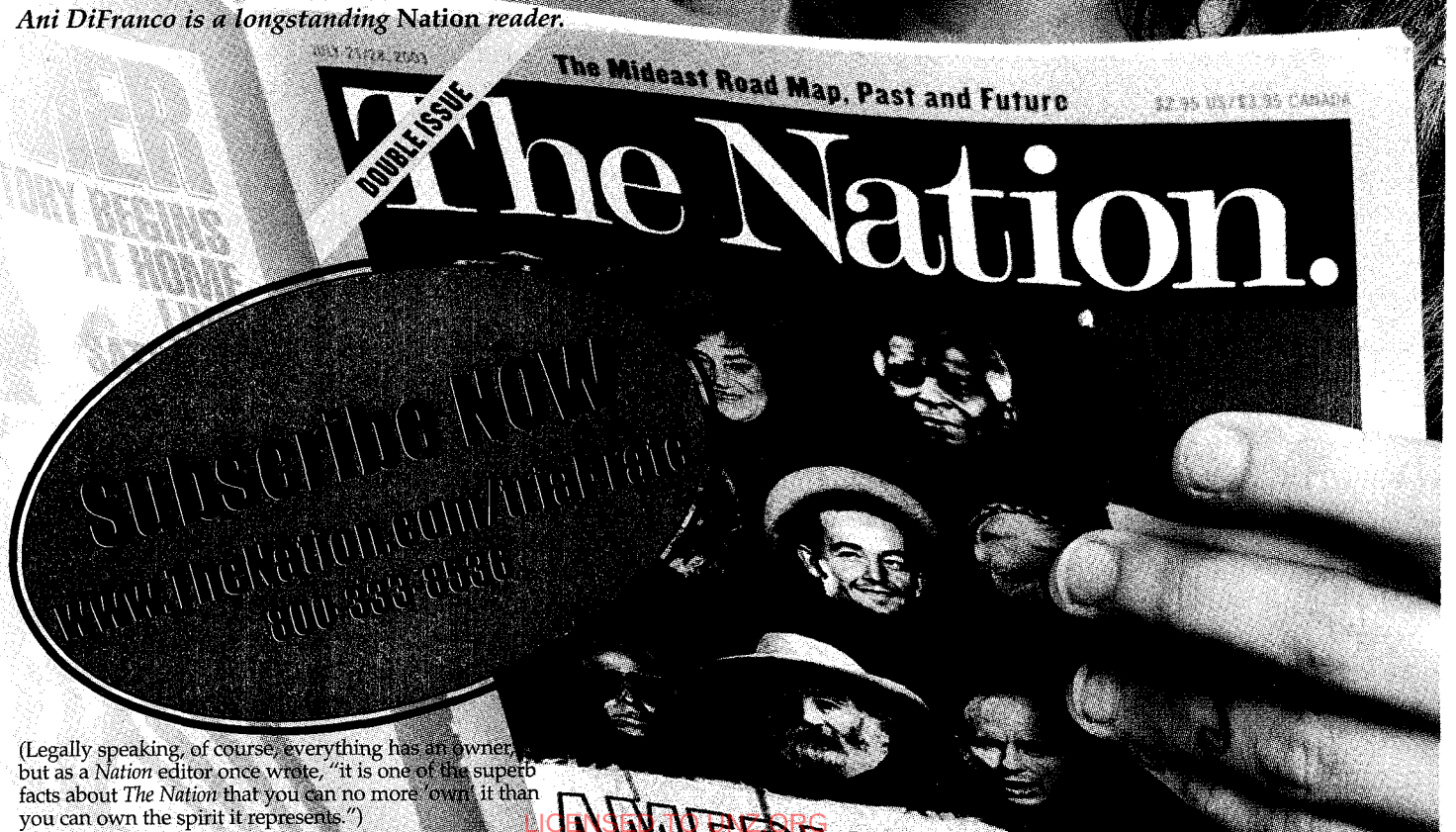
Ani DiFranco is a longstanding **Nation** *reader.*



(Legally speaking, of course, everything has an owner, but as a *Nation* editor once wrote, "it is one of the superb facts about *The Nation* that you can no more 'own' it than you can own the spirit it represents.")

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like Joe Lieberman, act like they're part of the presidential glee club.

On the economy, Democrats have an open-throated critique of Bush's failures—the budget and trade deficits, the stagnant wages, the growing inequality and poverty—but no clear alternative growth agenda. They've made fiscal probity a priority but hesitate to argue for fair taxes. This tends to leave them tongue-tied about major public investment. So when Bush argues for tax cuts and growth, too often Democrats argue about deficits.

Despite this, Democrats are in much better shape than you'd know from the pundits prating about their lack of unity and absence of ideas. In reality, George Bush's extremism has forged greater Democratic unity than ever. That unity was critical in routing Bush's primary second-term domestic initiative—privatization of Social Security—and will help Democrats make the election a national referendum on conservative corruption and incompetence. (Newt Gingrich helpfully supplied the slogan: "Had Enough?")

Democratic leaders in the House and Senate not only have drummed on the Republican "culture of corruption" but have forged relatively widespread agreement on a positive issue agenda that helps dramatize the costs of that corruption to voters. They've called for a concerted drive for energy independence, as opposed to the Administration's Big Oil cronyism. They'd fix the prescription drug program—put it in Medicare and require Medicare to negotiate lower prices—as opposed to the Big Pharma giveaways DeLay forced through Congress. They would invest in education and cut student loan interest rates in half, as opposed to GOP cuts of billions from student aid. They'd raise the minimum wage, which Republicans, catering to the business lobby, have frozen since 1997. They would get serious about homeland security, in stark contrast to the cronyism revealed in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. And they would attack the incompetence and corruption in Iraq, where insider companies like Halliburton made off with billions in no-bid contracts, even while the Pentagon charges them with fraudulent billing.

Neither Democratic nor Republican incumbents have exactly been stalwarts when it comes to getting big money out of politics. But this agenda gives Democrats a populist theme, pitting the common good against the special interest, working people against corporate lobbies.

Thus far, the Republicans' response has been as fractured as their popularity. Many legislators are scrambling to go local—highlighting their independence from Bush and their effectiveness in serving their constituents. But the White House and the RNC argue that their best hope is to make the election a fear-driven choice, not a referendum on conservative performance. As Karl Rove put it to the RNC, the President knows we're at war, whereas Democrats want to "cut and run"; the President will do what is necessary to keep Americans safe, while Democrats worry about warrants and procedure, opposing the "terrorist surveillance program" and renewal of the Patriot Act; Republicans are for tax cuts and growth, while Democrats will raise taxes and sabotage growth; and Republicans defend traditional values—like marriage—while Democrats undermine them.

This replays tunes that were brutally effective in 2002 and 2004. But few voters may still be listening to the President on Iraq, and most Americans think Republicans are out of touch when they tout the supposedly good economy. Plus, Republican posturing on social issues is losing credibility even on the right.

The Debate We Need to Have

How do progressives use the moment to pose a far broader challenge to the right? Democrats suffer badly from the fact that no one has any clear sense of what they stand for. In response, progressives have begun to argue that Democrats need to embrace a big idea—not simply a parcel of issue proposals—to define their public philosophy.

In an elegant essay, Michael Tomasky, editor of *The American Prospect*, urges Democrats to return to their tradition of "civic republicanism," of arguing for the common good, for a sense that we're all in this together and that together we can build a more perfect union. In *Being Right Is Not Enough*, Paul Waldman of Media Matters details how this contrasts clearly with the right's "we're all on our own" hyper-individualism. In *All Together Now: Common Sense for a Fair Economy*, Jared Bernstein of the Economic Policy Institute lays out an economic argument along the same lines. All agree that a common-good politics is best expressed in universal rather than small-bore programs—Medicare for all, for example—that contrast clearly with the conservative vision, with its scorn for any collective enterprise beyond the military.

The scope of the challenges facing the country sets the stage for this politics. And the widespread understanding that conservatives in power have championed the interests of the few rather than the many provides a compelling backdrop. But what keeps Democrats from putting forth a clear governing philosophy—and laying out an agenda to give it substance? Tomasky suggests that the problem is grounded in the success of the movements of the 1960s, which shattered the hypocrisies and racism of cold war liberalism but left in their wake an interest-group pluralism focused on rights rather than common enterprise. With less venom, he echoes the arguments of the Democratic Leadership Council and Newt Gingrich that Democrats lost their way in the 1960s, as the antiwar, women's and civil rights movements produced, to use Richard Nixon's venomous formulation, a party of "acid, amnesty and abortion." (Reagan added the "welfare queen" and the politics of racial division.)

Tomasky is silent about the failure of military Keynesianism to deal with stagflation in the 1970s, and the corporate offensive that declared open warfare on liberal economics, unions and consumer and environmental groups. Corporations built not only the ideological arsenal of the right but also the money wing of the Democratic Party. Democrats found that, as the majority in Congress, they could fill their campaign coffers with corporate contributions. Liberal Atari Democrats and conservative New Democrats learned to scorn unions as

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a special interest, and to champion much of the corporate agenda—balanced budgets, free trade, deregulation, privatization, capital-gains tax cuts, opposition to the minimum wage, even the short-term stock options that gave CEOs a multimillion-dollar personal incentive to cook the books. Democrats stopped speaking to the common good less because they were mugged by women's or civil rights groups than because they found it literally paid to stop fighting for working people in the economy.

The misdiagnosis leads to the wrong prescriptions. Tomasky fantasizes about a Democratic presidential candidate announcing to the "single-issue groups arrayed around my party" that "I don't seek your endorsement, won't fill out your questionnaires" in order to convince Americans that he or she would put the "common interest over the particular interest." This might be called the Democrats' Sister Souljah temptation—after Clinton's staged insult to Jesse Jackson in 1992: the calculated, if symbolic, straight-arming of your own base to demonstrate independence.

Progressive candidates must be willing to tell businesses that they don't need their money but want support to champion the public interest.

The problem with this "politics of inoculation," as Ruy Teixeira and John Halpin call it in their essay "Politics of Definition," is that it not only demoralizes the most passionate activists at the base of the party but also contributes to the sense that Democrats won't even defend their own. And of course, pushing away the base has been generally used by Democrats to move to a more cautious corporate politics—as when President Clinton gained praise for his "courage" in standing with the Fortune 500, the bulk of editorialists and all of Wall Street to champion NAFTA against trade union opposition.

In fact, it is far less the supposed dominance of the movements in the Democratic Party than the influence of Wall Street and corporate money that impedes building a bold new governing strategy. It is not women, civil rights or union movements that lead Democrats to embrace a bipartisan corporate trade strategy serving multinationals but not the nation; or that cause Democrats to help pass top-end tax cuts, that make them vote to keep CEO stock options off the books or that make them wary about backing national healthcare. To revive a true politics of the public interest, Democrats will have to challenge the grip that corporate money and conservative economic ideology have on the party.

Similarly, on foreign policy, the bipartisan assumption that the United States should police the world comes, obviously, from the corporate establishment, not the peace movement. The current rage in center-right Democratic circles is to resuscitate Harry Truman, substitute bin Laden for Stalin and jihadism for communism, and summon America to a new global struggle—claiming for Democrats a muscular tradition of collective security, in contrast to Bush's "conservative unilateralism." Neocons like Peter Beinart, fresh from cheering the country into the Iraq debacle, join New Dems like Al From in urging Democrats to prove their resolve by purging the left—the "MoveOn, Michael Moore wing"—from the Democratic Party. Members of the DLC call on the United States to increase its military spending, expand its expeditionary forces and "put the economy on a wartime footing." They pledge to "rally the American people" to sustain an "extended and robust" occupation in Iraq. And they urge the United States to intervene aggressively in the Middle East with a "sweeping program of economic, political and social reform." Since the DLC also pledges to reduce the budget deficits at the same time, Americans will have to tighten their belts to support such a mission.

This posture is deeply flawed. It distorts the threat and gets the response wrong. The problems of the Muslim world are not caused by the United States and the West having intervened too little. We need a policy on Islamist terrorists that isolates them rather than inflates them: alliances, intelligence cooperation, joint efforts to delegitimize their fanaticism, aggressive policing to bring them to justice. We need a strategy for America in a world very different from that of the end of World War II, when the dollar was literally as good as gold. This, once more, will require challenging the grip of multinational corporations and banks and their ideological fixation on building a global market protected from national regulation. Only then will we be able to define a "common good" politics that can help make the global economy work for the many and not the few.

If we are to reclaim a bold progressive politics, then the fantasy candidate will be one willing to tell a gathering of investment bankers that he or she doesn't need their money but would like their support to champion the public interest. This won't soon be the consensus position of the Democratic Party. It will require the building of an independent progressive movement willing to challenge entrenched interests and ideology, and able to support candidates and causes while building efforts to curb the influence of big money in politics.

This effort has only just begun, but surprising progress is possible in 2006. Forceful populists like Bernie Sanders of Vermont and Sherrod Brown of Ohio could help transform the debate if elected to the Senate. Audacious challenges—like that of Ned Lamont in taking on Joe Lieberman for the US Senate nomination in Connecticut—will help sober sitting Democrats about the need to represent their voters. New capacity—from the insurgent activism of MoveOn.org and the brassy blogosphere to the AFL-CIO's new community affiliate Working America's reach into middle America—will provide a greater ability to define the future, not simply to decry it.

The MoveOn wing of the party isn't about to be purged by the folks who helped propel us into Iraq. The democratic wing of the Democratic Party, in Paul Wellstone's—and later Howard Dean's—phrase, is expanding in influence and number. In response to Bush's forceful but failed project, progressives across the country are developing a feisty, populist politics that just may drive Democrats toward a real politics of the common good. ■

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Dr. William R. Cook is Distinguished Teaching Professor of History at the State University of New York at Geneseo. Professor Cook has taught courses in medieval and ancient history, the Renaissance and Reformation, the Bible and Christian thought, St. Francis of Assisi among others.

Honored many times for his teaching skills, Professor Cook has been the recipient of the Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching and the President's Award in Research and Creative Endeavors.

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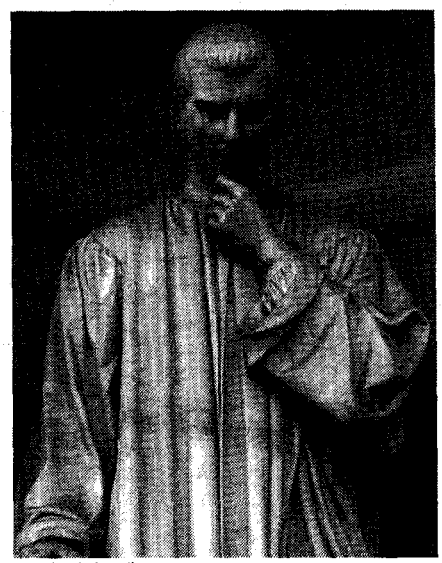

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IDENTIFY CANDIDATES. ADD MONEY. WATCH THE NUMBERS GROW.

How to Build a Farm Team

RUTH CONNIFF

Dean Nielsen, head of Progressive Majority's statewide office in Seattle, is surrounded by color-coded maps, campaign fliers and mountains of demographic research. Nielsen, a veteran of state and federal campaigns, could be running a hot Congressional race or a statewide presidential campaign. The demographer who did John Kerry's voter-targeting in Iowa in 2004 produced the maps. But the candidate here is running for county commissioner. And the names in dry-erase marker on the wall are candidates for school board and city council.

CHRISTOPHER SERRA

Welcome to the left-wing conspiracy. It's not vast. But it could be the start of something big. Progressive Majority recruits local and statewide candidates in a handful of states, funneling money from its national membership to support down-ballot races. The mission is deliberately narrow: Get progressives elected at the local level, and give them the tools to move up. The group has offices in five states now, with plans to expand to eleven by 2008 and twenty soon after.

The group has grown rapidly in two years. Washington was the first, in 2004, along with Wisconsin and Pennsylvania. Last year offices opened in Colorado and Arizona. Since 2004 112 candidates have run with a 71 percent success rate. And don't confuse smallness with lack of power or potential: The group's savvy has made it a bellwether for progressive politics. "Growing to scale, we could get to twenty-five states," says executive director Gloria Totten. "But whether you can raise the money is the million-dollar question." Make that the $24 million question. That's how much Totten figures is needed to reach a twenty-five-state capacity. Progressive Majority's current budget is $6.8 million. "Our goals are to take back the state legislatures, and then take those states off the table in national elections," says Totten.

The ultimate goal: a progressive takeover of state and national politics by 2010. "We could put Democrats in control of redistricting, and have thousands of progressive candidates running every year," says Totten. "And we're just not going to support people who are not good on our issues."

Progressive Majority is uncompromising in its politics. Candidates must get 100 percent on a forty-item questionnaire that tests their commitment to economic justice and civil rights, including gay rights, public education, universal healthcare, environmental protection and abortion. Through its Racial Justice Campaign Fund, the group aims to recruit candidates of color in numbers proportionate to each state's minority population. There are fifty-three so far. Instead of trying to graft a "diversity" mission onto a largely white national organization, it hires staff who know local communities and have street credibility.

Progressive Majority started in 2001 working with Congressional candidates. "Many of them were trying to run on a Democratic ticket that was telling them they shouldn't take progressive positions on the issues we cared about," says Totten. "It took us one cycle to say, 'Forget this. We're going to go to the bottom and bring up movement progressives.' Maybe they need to be dressed up a bit, helped with their political skills. But that's a hell of a lot easier than trying to convince them to take our side on the issues."

The historical equivalent of this effort is GOPAC, which has raised tens of millions to recruit and support movement conservatives running for down-ballot office. GOPAC's website tells the group's history—a mirror image of the current political moment. In 1978 Delaware Governor Pete du Pont "surveyed what was, from a Republican perspective, a bleak electoral landscape. A Democrat held the White House. Both houses of Congress were rock-solid Democrat, as they had been for more than a generation. Republican governors led just twelve states. Barely a quarter of state legislative bodies were in GOP control.... Du Pont concluded that the Republican Party had to build a 'farm team' if it was ever to become a governing majority party."

When Newt Gingrich took over GOPAC in the 1980s, he used the group to catapult conservatives to power across the nation. Gingrich's candidate-training audiotapes became legendary. GOPAC distributed the tapes to 10,000 new conservative candidates each month. All over the country, grassroots candidates began to adopt "Newtspeak" and learned to run disciplined campaigns. In 1994 Gingrich's class of GOPAC conservatives took over the House, ending forty years of Democratic control, and won a record number of governorships and statehouses. The politics of the entire country changed. At the same time that Gingrich was plotting his revolution, the Christian Coalition, under Ralph Reed's leadership, was working on a right-wing takeover of the nation's school boards. A 1995 Institute for First Amendment Studies piece on Reed's work noted that "more than 12,000 conservative Christians have been elected to school board seats since 1989. Over the next few years, many of these people will be working their way up within the political system."

Like these conservative models, Progressive Majority's hallmark is its professionalism. Staff comb through candidates' yearbooks and wedding albums to get them started fundraising, bring in professional coaches for message and media training, and babysit through fundraising calls and door-to-door campaigning. Every candidate must have a detailed plan and run a disciplined campaign. Progressive Majority works with candidates individually to develop a campaign plan and fundraising goals. That's

Ruth Conniff is the political editor of The Progressive *magazine.*

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because Progressive Majority sees its candidates—even those who lose their initial races—as future aspirants for higher office.

In 2003 Republicans took control of a significant number of state governments for the first time since 1952. They are now ahead in governorships twenty-eight to twenty-two and in Statehouses forty-nine to forty-seven. Many groups want to reverse that trend. Some bundle contributions for federal and statewide candidates (EMILY's List), offer candidate training (Wellstone Action) or organize volunteers to get out the vote (Democracy for America). "We're the only group doing comprehensive recruitment at the sheriff and school board level," says Totten.

Progressive Majority also collaborates with other groups. Jim Dean, brother of Howard Dean and chair of Democracy for America, is enthusiastic about the joint effort to "rebuild the infrastructure of the party." "It's a very entrepreneurial environment," he says. That's an optimistic way of saying that the Democratic Party has left a void by not building its own infrastructure. Progressive Majority sees that void as an opportunity to transform the party into a more progressive force. "When the party recruits candidates, money is too often the primary equation," says Dean. Or, as Blair Butterworth, a veteran political consultant in Washington State, puts it, "The parties have handed over the campaigns to people like me—political consultants. We're interested in winning." Butterworth explains that "taking on a candidate who may not win this time, but maybe next time, won't pay anyone's mortgage."

Financial viability—money, connections, and safely centrist politics—are often the test of candidates' viability. Ironically, that has meant less inspiring—and less winning—Democrats, and a party apparatus filled with people getting their tickets punched and moving on. "The average tenure of a state party chair is one year," Nielsen says. "I don't know anyone at the DNC anymore, because they've all turned over." Unlike the party or consultants, Progressive Majority aims to bring activists into politics who have been excluded or who have never thought about running before. Part of the challenge is to get a national donor list to set aside the short-term urgency of the next election and give money to local candidates they've never heard of. Most important, the group connects candidates to a network of pro-choice, labor and environmental interest groups.

The head of SEIU 775 in Washington State, David Rolf, says Progressive Majority fills "a very important niche" recruiting candidates and bringing his attention to local races he otherwise wouldn't follow. Rolf helped draft the labor questions on the Washington candidate questionnaire, and SEIU has supported Progressive Majority candidates. Rolf is more interested in the group's role as an incubator of progressive politics than he is in saving the Democratic Party. The Dems have shot themselves in the foot, he says, because they don't appeal to working people on bread-and-butter issues anymore. That's why, he says, SEIU is "not at a particularly monogamous moment" in politics—it works with Republicans in the state legislature who are good on its issues. "If wages continue to stagnate, employer-based healthcare continues to deteriorate, people have no hope of a dignified retirement, they will continue to vote on other issues and not economics, and the Democrats will go extinct," Rolf says. "The issue is finding what replaces them, instead of nothing. If the conservatives have their way, it will be nothing."

If Progressive Majority has its way, it will mean a reborn, progressive Democratic Party.

Nielsen steers promising recruits to consultants like Butterworth. Butterworth is delighted. "It's roundup time!" he says. "Dean gets 'em in the corral and feeds 'em up and says, 'Blair, here's your candidate.'" One such candidate is Darcy Burner. Nielsen tried to recruit her for a state legislative race. "She decided to go straight to the majors," says Butterworth, who is wowed by her talent and drive—a testament, in part, to Nielsen's good eye. In her first run for office, Burner stands a good chance of unseating a Republican incumbent in Washington State's Eighth Congressional District. Another candidate who is fulfilling Progressive Majority's vision of a pipeline to higher office is Derek Kilmer. Kilmer was Progressive Majority's number-one target for the Washington Statehouse in 2004. He won, beating a three-term conservative fundamentalist. TomPaine.com wrote of Kilmer's victory, "Derek accomplished something that most liberals believe is no longer possible in present-day America: he convinced voters in a relatively conservative swing district to vote their economic interests." As a freshman, Kilmer passed landmark economic development legislation and supported laws to reduce class size, increase teacher pay and increase enrollment in colleges. This year the conservative state senator in his district retired and Kilmer decided to run for his seat. His is now Progressive Majority's number-one targeted race for 2006.

As Nielsen and Butterworth are talking, Claudia Kauffman, a Native American candidate for State Senate, arrives. Progressive Majority connected Kauffman, an outsider, with Butterworth, one of the heaviest hitters in Washington State politics. Even though she's one of the top fundraisers in the state, Senate Democrats declined to meet with Kauffman after she announced. Then they put up a white cop to challenge her in the primary. If she wins, Kauffman will make history. Washington has no Native Americans in its legislature. Only four have ever served.

Butterworth begins the meeting by saying Kauffman needs to "knock people's socks off" at the state party convention. He suggests she say, "I want to welcome you immigrants to Washington, King County and to the Democratic Party." Kauffman frowns. She's not sure how that will go over. For the rest of the meeting, she sounds dour. "I went out doorbelling," she says. "I got my first door-slam—5,000 to go." Her apparent lack of enthusiasm surprises me. Nielsen says this discomfort is typical of new candidates. Part of it, he says, is cultural. "I've almost never seen a Native American candidate who was really outgoing." Still, Kauffman's fundraising and the grassroots enthusiasm she's aroused make her a contender. (By the end of April she'd raised $48,000; her opponent had $5,600—$5,100 of which he'd contributed.) Progressive Majority is sending her campaigning with other candidates to try to step up her one-on-one voter appeal.

Not everyone Progressive Majority works with is an overnight success. As newcomers, they make mistakes. Edie Gilliss, the state political director for Washington, says she tries to make sure they don't spend their money on gimmicks like T-shirts and nail files emblazoned with their names.

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Gilliss, who honed her skills in the gentle art of constructive criticism as an environmental activist with Green Corps and on local campaigns, has to dissuade neophyte candidates from some of their loopier ideas without crushing their confidence. When one candidate for the Statehouse, Deb Eddy, disparages door-to-door campaigning, saying "you can knock on 14,000 doors and still not win," Gilliss smiles and replies, "But if you're going to win, you have to knock on those doors."

The nature of a farm team, of course, is that some people are headed to the major leagues; others are not. One candidate went to Bed Bath & Beyond when she was supposed to be out doorbelling. Another got into office and called Nielsen from the State Senate to complain that he was fed up with going to meeting after meeting. "They're human," says Gilliss.

Progressive Majority candidates Sheila Stubbs, Claudia Kauffman and Yvonne Ward

I ride along with Gilliss on a visit to a State Senate candidate and quirky trial lawyer, Yvonne Ward. Ward rides a Harley and totes a .357 Magnum. She also preaches for civil liberties and against the Bush Administration's domestic spying. On her pickup she sports two bumper stickers: PROUD TO BE AN ASIAN AMERICAN and an anti–tort reform message: FIRST THEY TAKE OUR JURORS, THEN THEY TAKE OUR GUNS. Ward is an enthusiastic campaigner. She has knocked on 4,000 doors, persuading blue-collar voters in her swing district to support her. She's been less successful with the big progressive organizations—potential donors that Progressive Majority tried to connect her with, whom she alienated in her last, unsuccessful campaign.

"I didn't give her money after the primary, simply because I didn't think she was going to win," says Karen Cooper, Washington's executive director of NARAL. "Afterward, I ran into her at an event, and she was rude. Why would you be rude to someone who gives away money?" Ward says she's learned "not to take it personally" when interest groups do things she doesn't like—like supporting less progressive candidates. "It's illogical, but I'm not going to worry about it." Gilliss nods and smiles. Ward has improved since her last run. "I think she's learned a lot, and she'll be a great candidate this time," says Cooper.

Progressive Majority has stuck by her and, Ward says, influenced her in ways both practical and profound. "They had a question on their questionnaire on gay rights. I didn't want to get involved. Then they took me to meet with some people at [a Washington gay rights group], and they pressed me, and I had to think. That was a personal growth moment for me."

In a way, Progressive Majority's work is a test of whether it's possible to forge a majoritarian, progressive politics. The left is often accused of being a collection of balkanized interest groups. Can progressives connect minority voters, labor, environmentalists, abortion rights and gay rights activists with a unifying theme that appeals to most voters? Yes, says Holli Holliday, deputy director for program management. When Progressive Majority recruits candidates, "We talk about how those things interrelate as values. It really makes sense to them." In some cases, like Ward's, candidates have to be brought along on certain issues. But the group refuses to give one issue priority over another. Candidates must commit to the whole package. Running mainly in swing areas, Progressive Majority's candidates are challenging a conservative political culture.

Take Larry Nelson, who ran for mayor in the majority-Republican town of Waukesha, Wisconsin. George W. Bush carried Waukesha in 2004 with 61 percent of the vote. Nelson's opponent, a member of the State Assembly, ran on her party's mantra, tax relief. Nelson tried to convince voters that tax cuts were not as important as quality of life. Conservative talk-radio host Jeff Wagner predicted that Nelson's opponent "slaughters" him. Instead he won, with a message of good schools, jobs and public services. His victory stunned local pundits.

Progressive Majority stays out of liberal enclaves like Madison and Oberlin. Instead, it focuses on areas the Democrats too often write off. "People assume we're going to be in progressive parts of the state," says Totten. "That's not true. We work in swing areas, because that's where most of the opportunities lie." Progressive Majority candidates recaptured a Colorado Springs school board from conservatives "right in the heart of Focus on the Family country," says Totten, "because we found people who were really of that community. It shows how little attention progressives have paid to these areas."

With the country moving toward a majority-minority population, Progressive Majority also takes very seriously the job of reconnecting people of color to politics. Malia Lazú, who runs the Racial Justice Campaign Fund, got started in politics turning out voters in inner-city Boston. "Kerry made my job damn near impossible," she says. By recruiting candidates within minority communities, Progressive Majority generates more enthusiasm.

Progressive Majority's first Racial Justice Campaign recruiter started this spring in Wisconsin. Ryan Baker, a political science major at the University of Wisconsin, has deep roots on Milwaukee's North Side, which he helped organize after a 7-year-old girl was shot in the forehead. Residents went door to door collecting money for her family. "We ended up raising thousands of dollars, and then the shooter turned himself in," Baker recalls. "It was amazing." Later he was part of a massive demonstration when his friend Frank Jude Jr. was beaten up by Milwaukee police: "We got 6,000 people marching down Wisconsin Avenue to the federal courthouse to demand justice." Now he's trying to harness that grassroots energy to electoral politics.

Progressive Majority helped Sheila Stubbs become the first African-American to serve on the Dane County board in Wisconsin. Stubbs is a former probation officer and community activist. "As an agent I'd visit offenders in prison. Then they'd get released into my neighborhood. I'd take them to the community center to get free clothes and food. I'd make sure they knew the health department nurse, in case they needed TB shots. I'd ask them if they wanted to go to church. I believe people can change," Stubbs says. One of her ambitions is to get the Department of Corrections to give every former prisoner a bus pass. Stubbs

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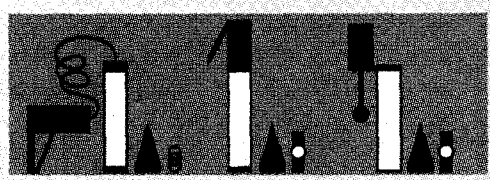

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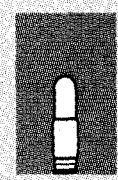

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believes ex-cons are set up to fail. Stubbs lights up talking about her ambitions for expanding the community center where she volunteers. Her deep commitment to her neighborhood, and her enthusiasm for improving it, shine through. But she wasn't sure how to run for office. "I honestly did not know you had to raise your own money," she says.

A local progressive alderman connected Stubbs with Progressive Majority. "They said, 'Do you know what a PAC is?'" she recalls. "I said no." Once she received Progressive Majority's endorsement, donations began rolling in—from Democracy for America, the municipal employees' union AFSCME and local politicians. "They gave me one-on-one help whenever I needed it," she says of Progressive Majority. "I didn't know 'smart growth' and other terms. I didn't know how to answer some questions—they were always there for me. On election day the entire office came over." She is excited that Progressive Majority is going to fly her to Washington, DC, in June for the group's annual conference. "They get it. I need to see it," she says. Progressive Majority has encouraged her to think about a political future that seemed pie-in-the-sky before she ran.

The power of Progressive Majority's idea is that it can connect motivated, grassroots candidates like Stubbs to interest groups and a political structure that desperately need new blood. Progressive Majority is small, though, and the job of moving national politics in a progressive direction is daunting. "We've doubled in size every year since we started," Totten points out. Still, she acknowledges, it may take more to move the whole country. "We've started to think about how to make it more replicable," she says—so other groups can copy Progressive Majority's vision. As Ron Dellums, the progressive former Congressman from California, who is now running for mayor of Oakland, puts it: "Working at the local level is indispensable because the closer you are to the voters the easier it is to speak to the key issue of public policy: who benefits. And the greater the possibility that grassroots organizing can overcome the power of organized special interests."

Meanwhile, Progressive Majority's staff are intensely loyal to the candidates they've committed to help. Holli Holliday remembers having the opposite experience during many years spent working on Democratic campaigns. The party would pull up stakes in areas that dropped off the national priority list. "I can't count the number of times I've been working on races targeted by the party, and then in May or June—exodus month, we used to call it—they'd pull out," says Holliday. "It's gut-wrenching."

"We're there to the bitter end," she says. That's because, win or lose, for Progressive Majority, each campaign is only the beginning. ■

WHAT CAN PROGRESSIVES EXPECT FROM ILLINOIS'S CHARISMATIC FRESHMAN SENATOR?

Mr. Obama Goes to Washington

DAVID SIROTA

It's not every day that God calls your cell phone. But that's exactly what happened to me on an overcast afternoon last November. "Is this David?" asked the deep, vaguely familiar voice on the other end. When I told him it was, he said, "This is Barack Obama." Thinking it was a good friend playing a joke, I said I didn't believe him. But no, the voice insisted with a laugh, it was Illinois Senator Barack Obama, otherwise known in cult-of-personality political circles as a deity, a rising Democratic star or, as George W. Bush recently called him, "the pope."

CHRISTOPHER SERRA

Obama was calling because he was bothered that I had written a few blog posts questioning positions he'd taken that appeared to belie his progressive image, most prominently his vote for a corporate-written "reform" of class-action lawsuits, his refusal to frontally challenge the Iraq War after running as an antiwar candidate and his vote to confirm Condoleezza Rice as Secretary of State. One by one, Obama methodically answered each criticism. And when the call ended with his telling me he was committed to working with progressives, I was perplexed. Obama certainly talks a great game—but then, so have many false prophets over the years. I requested a formal interview, and to my surprise, Obama readily agreed. By the end of a day in Washington with him, I had the answers to two key questions: What can progressives expect from Barack Obama, and what does he really aspire to be?

I first met the Illinois senator in his Capitol Hill office, where he introduced me to his staff, all of whom seemed totally at ease with him. Unlike in many Congressional offices, there was no overuse of the words "senator" or "yes, sir." In separate conversations I had with many staffers, he was referred to as just "Barack." I was given a packet documenting Obama's accomplishments since his 2004 election, and it was hard not to be simultaneously impressed and underwhelmed. Given that he's one of the most junior members of the Senate, his successful efforts to secure additional funding for veterans' medical care and energy development in Illinois are no small feats. But considering that he's one of the most famous politicians in America, the accomplishments are fairly mundane.

"That's the constraints of being in the minority," Obama said, when asked why he hadn't used his media megaphone to push for more systemic changes. Then he adopted a signature Obama move: downplaying expectations. "What has probably been

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strategic was in the first year, my thinking was not to do a lot of message bills, in part because I've got a lot of colleagues here who do message bills," he said. "A lot of what I think is interpreted as caution is just a function of my institutional role as a freshman in the minority party and the limits that places on me in terms of being able to move legislation out of committee."

In a speech later that day, this theme came out again as he told the audience, "Remember, I've got a lot of clout—I went from 99th to 98th in seniority this year." His sarcastic point has some merit—but only some. After all, legislation is just one measure of success. Another is how big an impact a politician has on the public debate. Most members of Congress have to scratch and claw to get attention even on pressing issues. Obama, by contrast, can put whatever's on his mind on the front page of major newspapers. Does he want a public image as a low-key legislative technocrat with a nice packet of accomplishments? Or does he want to be someone who uses the Senate platform to move the national political debate?

Obama carefully answered the question about how he wants to define himself: "The amount of publicity I have received... means that I've got to be more sensitive in some ways to not step on my colleagues." For those who see him as a bold challenger of the system, this may be disappointing. After all, it oozes deference to the Senate clubbiness that has killed many a populist cause. And Obama has defended that club from outside pressure not only in his rhetoric but in his actions. For instance, last year he posted a long article on the blog Daily Kos criticizing attacks against lawmakers who voted for right-wing Supreme Court nominee John Roberts—even though Obama himself voted against Roberts. And in January Obama publicly criticized a fledgling effort to filibuster nominee Samuel Alito. Obama actually voted for the filibuster, but his statements helped take the steam out of that effort.

Though he opposed the Iraq War in his election campaign, in his first year in office Obama deferred to Washington's prowar consensus.

True, Obama did show a rare flash of defiance when he unsuccessfully pushed legislation this year to create an Office of Public Integrity, which would have enforced anti-corruption laws. But that kind of power-challenging move, which was met with strong resistance from both parties, was an exception. At the same time that he was ruffling feathers with that bill, he was one of the many Democratic senators who fled from Russell Feingold's motion to censure Bush over the White House's refusal to seek court orders for domestic wiretapping. Though polls showed that roughly half of Americans supported censure, it was shunned by the Senate club as too confrontational, and Obama seemed to agree.

That's the key word in trying to figure out Obama: He *seems* like everything to everybody, which is not necessarily his fault. Much of the media coverage of Obama has been personality focused, as the story of the son of a Kenyan and a Kansan, the third African-American senator since Reconstruction. Because the media have not looked as closely at his political positions, Obama has taken on the quality of a blank screen on which people can project whatever they like. But he hasn't discouraged this. A masterful politician, Obama has a Bill Clinton–esque talent for maximizing that screen and appearing comfortable in almost any setting. And, like Clinton, Obama has an impressive control of the issues and a mesmerizing ability to connect with people.

Many progressives wonder whether Obama will show that an outsider can force real change in government, or that the Senate club has become so insulated that Mr. Smith can no longer go to Washington. But that question brings another one: whether Obama wants to challenge the club in the first place. "There's no doubt that I will be staking out more public positions on more issues as time goes on," Obama said cryptically. Does that mean he is going to be more confrontational? "The question is not whether you end up being confrontational," he said in a tone that made clear he had been pondering that idea long before I brought it up. "The question is, Do you let confrontations arise as a consequence of your putting forward a positive vision of what needs to happen and letting the confrontation organically emerge, or do you go out of your way for it?"

By almost all measures, Obama has been a solid liberal, both in his early career as a community organizer and then as a local politician. In the Illinois State Senate he supported increased funding for healthcare and education and wrote bills to publicly finance judicial campaigns and create a state earned-income tax credit. His charisma, intellect and ability to build bipartisan coalitions were evident early in his career, fueling progressives' high hopes for him. In the US Senate, for the most part he has stuck with his party on key votes when so-called moderates didn't. For example, Obama voted against the corporate-written Central American Free Trade Agreement. And he was particularly outspoken after Hurricane Katrina, leading the charge among lawmakers demanding answers about the government's failure to protect New Orleans.

But while Obama has a solid liberal record, many believe there is a difference between a liberal and a true progressive. For example, his signature legislation today is his "healthcare for hybrids" proposal, which would give away hundreds of millions to auto companies to relieve them of some of the costs of paying for retirees' healthcare. In exchange, the companies would produce more fuel-efficient vehicles. The goals are unassailable, but the policy reflects the liberal carrot of appeasing a powerful industry rather than the progressive stick of forcing that industry to shape up by simply mandating higher fuel-efficiency standards.

The occasions when Obama has broken with his party indicate similar inclinations. Just one month into his term, the former civil rights lawyer defied the Democrats and voted for the class-action "reform" bill. Opposed by most major civil rights and consumer watchdog groups, this Big Business–backed legislation was sold to the public as a way to stop "frivolous" lawsuits. But everyone in Washington knew the bill's real objective was to protect corporate abusers. A few weeks later, though he voted against the credit-card-industry-written bankruptcy bill, Obama also voted against an amendment that would have capped credit-card interest rates at a whopping 30 percent (he defends his vote by claiming the amendment was poorly written).

Then there is the Iraq War. Obama says that during his 2004 election campaign he "loudly and vigorously" opposed the war.

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As *The New Yorker* noted, "many had been drawn initially by Obama's early opposition to the invasion." But "when his speech at the antiwar rally in 2002 was quietly removed from his campaign Web site," the magazine reported, "activists found that to be an ominous sign"—one that foreshadowed Obama's first months in the Senate. Indeed, through much of 2005, Obama said little about Iraq, displaying a noticeable deference to Washington's bipartisan foreign policy elite, which had pushed the war. One of Obama's first votes as a senator was to confirm Condoleezza Rice as Secretary of State despite her integral role in pushing the now-debunked propaganda about Iraq's WMD.

In November Obama's reticence on the war ended. Five days after hawkish Democratic Representative Jack Murtha famously called for a withdrawal, Obama gave a speech calling for a drawdown of troops in 2006. "Those of us in Washington have fallen behind the debate that is taking place across America on Iraq," he said. But then he retreated. On *Meet the Press* in January Obama regurgitated catchphrases often employed by neoconservatives to caricature those demanding a timetable for withdrawal. "It would not be responsible for us to unilaterally and precipitously draw troops down," he said. Then, as polls showed support for the war further eroding, Obama tacked again, giving a speech in May attacking the war and mocking the "idea that somehow if you say the words 'plan for victory' and 'stay the course' over and over and over and over again...that somehow people are not going to notice the 2,400 flag-draped coffins that have arrived at the Dover Air Force Base."

Obama will fight only for those changes that fit within the Washington mainstream, instead of using his platform to redefine the boundaries.

Another area of retreat and equivocation for Obama is his role in party politics. He had previously said he didn't "want to be the kingmaker," because "it's never been sort of a role that I've aspired to in politics." Yet Obama forcefully intervened in a suburban Chicago Congressional primary on behalf of Iraq veteran Tammy Duckworth, the candidate handpicked by Democratic power brokers, against grassroots contender Christine Cegelis, who in 2004 garnered an astonishing 44 percent against GOP incumbent Henry Hyde and who almost beat Duckworth. Wasn't this the very kingmaking role he'd said he didn't want to be a part of? Obama said only, "There are going to be strategic questions about who do I think is best equipped to win the general elections." One senior Congressional aide said, "Obama showed himself to be the pure political hack he is. Here you have a guy whose own success was predicated on winning primaries against party-backed candidates now using his enormous political capital to go to bat for the same party machines he says he doesn't want to be a tool of."

Although Obama said such high-profile primary endorsements were rare, a similar controversy arose a few weeks later. Just as Ned Lamont's antiwar primary campaign against prowar Connecticut Senator Joe Lieberman was gaining momentum, Obama traveled to the state to endorse Lieberman. Like the Duckworth endorsement, Obama's move was timed to derail an insurgent, grassroots candidate. To progressives this may seem surprising, given Obama's progressive image. But remember, according to the *New York Times* it is Lieberman—one of the most conservative, prowar Democrats in Washington—who is "Obama's mentor in the Senate as part of a program in which freshman senators are paired with incumbents."

At the end of a long day, we sat down in Obama's Capitol Hill office. It was time to talk specifics, so I asked him to explain his "healthcare for hybrids" auto-industry proposal. Why not simply push to strengthen fuel-efficiency mandates?

"There is a difference between an opinion writer or thinker and a legislator," he said, making sure to note that he is also a co-sponsor of bills that would mandate better fuel efficiency. "I a lot of times don't get an opportunity to frame legislation in ways that I would exactly prefer. I have to take into account what is possible within the constraints of the institution." Fuel-efficiency standards, he said, provided a good example of what he was talking about. Michigan Democrats "Carl Levin and Debbie Stabenow are as progressive a set of senators as you can hope to find," he continued. "But if you have a conversation with them about standards, they are adamantly opposed. That's something that I've got to take into account if I'm going to be able to actually get something accomplished."

This theme had been reiterated all day: Obama is all about the art of the possible within the system. "This is a classic conflict within the left: Are you a revolutionary or are you a reformist?" Obama said. "I am less concerned with the labels that are placed on me in terms of what kind of leader I am, and I am more interested in results.... I think within the institutional structures we have, we can significantly improve the life chances of ordinary Americans." I asked him to give me some specific examples of what he meant. Is a proposal to convert America's healthcare system to one in which the government is the single payer for all services revolutionary or reformist? "Anything that Canada does can't be entirely revolutionary—it's Canada," Obama joked. "When I drive through Toronto, it doesn't look like a bunch of Maoists." Even so, Obama said that although he "would not shy away from a debate about single-payer," right now he is "not convinced that it is the best way to achieve universal healthcare."

Obama has a remarkable ability to convince you that his positions are motivated purely by principles, not tactical considerations. This skill is so subtle and impressive, it resembles Luke Skywalker's mastery of the Force. It's a powerful tool for a Democratic Party that often emanates calculation rather than conviction. "I don't think in ideological terms. I never have," Obama said, continuing on the healthcare theme. "Everybody who supports single-payer healthcare says, 'Look at all this money we would be saving from insurance and paperwork.' That represents 1 million, 2 million, 3 million jobs of people who are working at Blue Cross Blue Shield or Kaiser or other places. What are we doing with them? Where are we employing them?"

Shifting back to how he sees himself in the Senate, Obama seemed to amend his previous statement about what kind of leadership progressives can expect from him. "I am agnostic in terms of the models that solve these problems," he said. "If the only way to solve a problem is structural, institutional change, then I will be for structural, institutional change. If I think we

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can achieve those same goals within the existing institutions, then I am going to try to do that, because I think it's going to be easier to do and less disruptive and less costly and less painful.... I think everybody in this country should have basic healthcare. And what I'm trying to figure out is how to get from here to there." He went on to tell me about his support for other structural changes such as public financing of elections, forcing broadcasters to offer free airtime for candidates, adding strong labor protections to trade pacts and major efforts to create a more just tax system.

Obama is telling the truth—he's not opposed to structural changes at all. However, he appears to be interested in fighting only for those changes that fit within the existing boundaries of what's considered mainstream in Washington, instead of using his platform to redefine those boundaries. This posture comes even as polls consistently show that Washington's definition of mainstream is divorced from the rest of the country's (for example, politicians' refusal to debate the war even as polls show that Americans want the troops home).

Obama's deference to these boundaries was hammered home to me when our discussion touched on the late Senator Paul Wellstone. Obama said the progressive champion was "magnificent." He also gently but dismissively labeled Wellstone as merely a "gadfly," in a tone laced with contempt for the senator who, for instance, almost single-handedly prevented passage of the bankruptcy bill for years over the objections of both parties. This clarified Obama's support for the Hamilton Project, an organization formed by Citigroup chair Robert Rubin and other Wall Street Democrats to fight back against growing populist outrage within the party. And I understood why Beltway publications and think tanks have heaped praise on Obama and want him to run for President. It's because he has shown a rare ability to mix charisma and deference to the establishment.

Barack Obama makes a convincing case that he is not overly motivated by political machinations. Many have accused him of Hillary Clinton–style positioning for a potential presidential run. But that kind of calculation does not appear to be in play, at least not right now—and Obama chafes when anyone implies the opposite. "You should always assume that when I cast a vote or make a statement it is because it is what I believe in," he said. "The thing that bothers me is the assumption that if I make a judgment that's different from yours, then it must mean I am less progressive or my goals are different, meaning I must be not really committed to helping people but rather I am trying to triangulate or drift toward the DLC [Democratic Leadership Council]."

Still, there's no question that his passions are confined by intense caution. Joan Claybrook, president of the consumer watchdog group Public Citizen, tells the story of how, after Obama voted for the class-action bill, he attended a meeting of public-interest groups. "We were worried about what his vote indicated about him for the future," she said. "And he told us, 'Sometimes you have to trim your sails.' And I asked myself, Trim your sails for what? You just got elected by a wide margin—what are you trimming your sails for?"

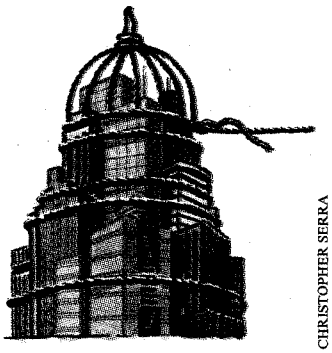
Obama will often be a reliable liberal vote, and he can give one hell of a speech. But we should believe him when he downplays our expectations. He says he's "a work in progress," but he's in an institution that tends to stifle greatness. As comic Jon Stewart said, "Everybody thought Barack Obama was going to [inspire people] when he came to Washington, but, you know, the Senate seems like the place where smart people go to die." ■

WITH THE REIGNING ECONOMIC IDEOLOGY DISCREDITED, THE WAY IS CLEAR FOR NEW IDEAS.

The Future Is Now

WILLIAM GREIDER

Momentous change is approaching in American politics. Conceivably, the turning point has already arrived, too indistinct to recognize. We are witnessing the demise of the reigning economic ideology. A deep shift of this kind is a very rare event, one that comes along only every thirty or forty years. Economic disorders accumulate that the orthodoxy cannot answer and may even have caused. Eventually, the ideological presumptions are discredited by real-world contradictions.



CHRISTOPHER SERRA

The last time this happened was in the 1970s, when economic liberalism foundered and collapsed. Ossified intellectually, unable to adjust to changed circumstances, the liberal order did not know how to deal with economic consequences like inflationary stagnation. As the long postwar prosperity lost its energy, so did liberal politics.

Something similar is happening now to the Republicans. Their problem is the underperforming economy, which must borrow to stay afloat and, roughly speaking, lifts only half the boats. The conservative order—inspired two generations ago by Milton Friedman and Friedrich von Hayek and brought to power by Republican ascendancy—pushed government aside so business and capital would be free to generate more lasting prosperity. But their utopian promise was not fulfilled. Instead, the right's principal product, one can say, was economic inequality.

The breakdown won't necessarily produce an immediate shift in power. When the bottom fell out of liberal doctrine thirty years ago, what first unfolded was confusion and political paralysis, then an awkward retreat by the Democrats until they were finally displaced by the aggressive new conservatives under Ronald Rea-

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gan. But it does mean that Republicans have lost the political cohesion to advance their more extreme measures (privatizing Social Security, freeing capital entirely of taxation).

More to the point, the way is now open for alternative thinking: the new ideas that can lead to a new governing order. These ideas must be grounded in a determination to give people back their future. The strange paradox of our times is that despite America's fabulous wealth, most people's lives are shadowed by economic anxieties and real confinements, the wounds that market ideology has imposed. They fear that much worse is ahead for their children. Reform must re-establish this fundamental principle: *The economy exists to support society and people, not the other way around.* Only government can liberate them from the harsh rule of the marketplace, the demands imposed by capital and corporations that stunt or stymie the full pursuit of life and liberty in this complex industrial society. This very wealthy country has the capacity to insure that all citizens, regardless of status or skills, have the essential needs to pursue secure, self-directed lives. This starts with the right to health, work, livable incomes and open-ended education, and to participate meaningfully in the decisions that govern their lives. The marketplace has no interest in providing these. It is actively destroying them.

A coherent alternative agenda that will fulfill these principles does not yet exist. Nor will a liberal-progressive program emerge miraculously if the Democratic Party should somehow regain power in the next few years, since many Democrats in Congress have internalized the market ideology and collaborate with the right. But elements of that alternative agenda are already ripe for discussion. Before we explore some of them, however, we should examine the economics of why the right failed.

History's Goat

The economic engine is running on empty. It looks robust only if you ignore the underlying conditions. Household savings were negative last year for the first time since 1933; that is, families kept up by spending more than they earned and by borrowing to do so. The national economy, encompassing private-sector business and government as well as households, also had negative savings in the fall quarter of 2005, despite bountiful corporate profits.

The household accounting reflects a common reality: Wage incomes, adjusted for inflation, are stagnant or falling. The weekly wage for 92 million people in nonsupervisory jobs (82 percent of the private-sector workforce) has declined for three consecutive years, largely because total working hours shrank across the economy. Even per capita income—a broader measure that includes the billionaires—declined for four years in a row under Bush. One in six manufacturing jobs has been lost since 2000 (39 percent in communications equipment, 37 percent in semiconductors). These losses are explained as free-market "efficiencies" but mainly represent the global relocation of American production.

The cumulative effect is an economy that doesn't produce enough to pay for what it wants and needs. The conservative order, notwithstanding its proclaimed values, makes up the difference by borrowing. In five years, Bush has added $2.5 trillion to the federal debt with more to come (thanks to his regressive tax cutting, deficit spending, the war in Iraq and the subpar economy). In the same five years, the national economy as a whole took on even more debt—$2.9 trillion—to pay for the ever-swelling trade deficits. The creditors are our trading partners, led by China and Japan. The collective indebtedness is growing much faster than the nation's collective income—always an ominous sign for a debtor. George W. Bush may wind up as history's goat because he had the bad luck to inherit the effects of twenty-five years of rightward governance (including Bill Clinton's tenure). Government shifted tax burdens downward, favored military spending over productive domestic investment, encouraged multinationals to disperse jobs and production overseas and embraced the Federal Reserve's hard-money monetary policy, which suppressed working-class wages. Fortunes were shifted upward, fabulously.

The era produced a great ideological irony: Starting with Reagan, the right repeatedly finessed its contradictions with debt—the borrow-and-spend "sin" they once assigned to liberalism. In 1981, Reagan's first year as President, the federal debt surpassed $1 trillion for the first time ever. Twenty-five years later, despite fiscal restraint under Clinton, the federal debt has surpassed $8 trillion.

The Republicans now find themselves in a corner with no good choices. If Bush withdrew the stimulus of federal deficits, economic growth would collapse. The sensible course would require a massive shift in priorities—moving money and benefits from the wealthy few to the struggling many—but that is ideological heresy and would double-cross the GOP's monied patrons. Bush could confront the huge trade deficits by imposing unilateral limits on imports, but that is also a humiliating heresy he won't touch. So conservatives are likely to muddle on, hoping the economy will somehow work itself out of its weaknesses. Progressives should get busy now developing alternative ideas for the major shift that must inevitably follow.

For Life and Liberty

You wouldn't know it from reading the newspapers, but substantial and often overwhelming majorities of Americans have repeatedly endorsed governing concepts that conventional politicians dismiss as radical or unrealistic: Universal healthcare. A job for everyone who wants to work, guaranteed by the government. Secure retirements. Stronger enforcement of environmental laws. Stronger defenses against encroaching corporate power. Union protection for workers against exploitative employers. The list goes on. These widely endorsed goals assume an activist government that nurtures people and society first, ahead of corporations and capital. Imagine a political agenda that sets out to give the people what they say they want.

The heart of the problem is the deterioration of work and wages. There are many other elements damaging the pursuit of life and liberty; but as old-school liberals always understood, if wages and working conditions are not moving in the right direction, you won't accomplish much toward healing other social injuries and disorders. What follows is a short list of provocative ideas meant to stimulate imaginations.

§ *Repair wages.* This should start with government acting as the "employer of last resort" and involves a large and permanent program of federally financed jobs, open to anyone ready and

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willing to work and closely integrated with skill training and education. For most workers, the public jobs would be temporary, a safe harbor until opportunities improve in private employment. What might the people do? Any work that helps address the vast inventory of unmet public needs—a broad program of public investment that rebuilds neighborhoods, reclaims ruined ecosystems or restores production. Local citizens and governments would choose the priorities, not Washington.

The most dramatic benefits would obviously accrue to the poor—injecting jobs with reliable (and legal) cash incomes into desolate urban and rural communities, a financial platform to stimulate private enterprise and redevelopment. Young people could hold part-time public jobs, conditioned on staying in school, and bring cash home to the family, while getting hands-on experience and productive skills—a powerful alternative to dead-end lives. The federal job guarantee would also bolster the broad working class: a new safety net for the people displaced by recessions, offshoring or corporate downsizing. Wages could be scaled upward for the public jobs, based on the skill levels involved, and the displaced industrial workers would have access to retraining.

Someone should ask working people whether they would choose cheaper prices at Wal-Mart or better incomes for themselves.

Above all, a permanent program of public employment, properly conceived, would boost wages. It would mop up surplus labor (about two times larger than official unemployment) and create a new wage floor, generating upward pressure in the labor market. In a more bountiful era, this might seem unnecessary, even inflationary. But today's economy has things upside down: It proliferates the low-wage service jobs that cannot sustain families, while it gradually eliminates the high-wage manufacturing jobs that provide middle-class incomes. Public jobs, together with a sustained campaign to raise the minimum wage and other measures, would gradually shift the flow of rewards in the other direction.

Employers will not like this, obviously, and will argue that rising wages are bad for the economy—higher prices, lower profits. But is that really so? The steady deterioration of working-class wages over the past thirty years did not produce a healthier economy. Someone should ask working people whether they would choose cheaper prices at Wal-Mart or better incomes for themselves. The current labor market does indeed benefit the more affluent Americans who have been enriched by what happened to the price of labor. Now it is time to reverse the flow and heal the wounded—that is, restore a balanced prosperity.

§ *Deregulate labor.* The destruction of worker rights (the right to organize a union, established by the 1935 National Labor Relations Act) is a great failure of regulatory government and a critical factor in the deterioration of wages and working conditions. Union density has declined to 8 percent of the private-sector workforce, yet a poll last year found that 53 percent of workers would like to be represented by a union—if they could. The gap between aspirations and reality is maintained by systematic and often illegal corporate tactics that block workers from exercising their rights.

One answer might be to eliminate the National Labor Relations Board—free the workers of regulation. Federal law and regulators are quite lame in policing the corporate illegalities, but workers and unions are prohibited by law from using effective tactics like secondary boycotts, sit-down strikes occupying workplaces and mass mobilizations. A newly enacted labor law would be grounded in constitutional rights—free speech, freedom of assembly, the Thirteenth Amendment prohibiting involuntary servitude—rather than politically vulnerable regulatory law.

Rethinking labor rights is another opportunity to build bridges across class differences by creating a broader set of rights that apply to all employees, regardless of union status. That would involve basic protections against managerial abuses, and also new rights of self-expression and the right to participate in decision-making within the firm. The best companies already do this, because they know the free flow of information among employees stimulates innovation and efficiency reforms. Labor law effectively inhibits unionized workers from even meeting with nonunion colleagues without the boss's consent.

Ultimately, labor-law reform should encourage an economy of worker ownership in which employees share responsibility for the firm with management and share more equitably in the returns. The top-down corporate structure is a major source of inequality. Does anyone imagine that employees, if they had a voice, would ratify the scandalous executive pay for CEOs?

§ *Tax corporate behavior.* Major corporations used to be part of the liberal social contract. They were the institutional partners that distributed health insurance, pensions, labor guarantees and other progressive benefits to workers and communities (reimbursed by federal tax deductions). But during the last generation, companies have resigned from this role, turning on their employees and extracting "profit" by expropriating the value that belonged to their workers: wages, pensions, healthcare benefits and good working conditions.

Government has to step in and fill the void to avert social calamity. The old arrangement helped build the middle class, but it was never as good as it sounded. Roughly half the country was left out. Moreover, the voluntary nature gave managements the power to set the terms—and the freedom to break promises—which were challenged only by unions.

Universal health insurance is the most pressing imperative because health costs continue to soar as the burden is shifted to employees. Pensions may become a larger crisis in the long run. The right's twenty-five-year experiment with individual pension accounts has failed, leaving even middle-class workers unprepared for retirement. Instead of tinkering with the failed concept, reformers should create an entirely new national pension: universal, mandatory savings under government supervision that, alongside Social Security, will insure comfortable retirement for all. One model is the pension plan already enjoyed by federal employees and members of Congress [see Greider, "Riding Into the Sunset," June 27, 2005].

Companies need to pay, meanwhile, for their antisocial behavior. They collect hundreds of billions in tax breaks and subsidies, yet abuse society in return—degrading the environment and communities, ignoring the national interest, offloading their obligations. Corporate taxation has declined since the 1960s from more

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than 20 percent of federal revenue to less than 10 percent. Despite their profitability, scores of major corporations pay zero taxes (some even collect refunds). One plausible remedy is to refashion the corporate income tax as an important new mechanism for enforcing corporate obligations to society. Imagine a reformed tax code that clears away all the corrupted loopholes and sets the basic corporate tax rate higher, at around 45 percent.

Corporations would then be able to reduce their tax liability—perhaps by 15 points or more—by demonstrating that their performance adheres to higher social standards. Does the company, for instance, increase wages for workers in step with its rising productivity, as economists assume, or does it pocket the money for the insiders and shareholders? A positive record could knock several points off the tax rate. Does the company have an egregious history of trashing environmental laws or fraudulent dealings in financial markets? It would be ineligible for reductions. If the company is increasing its American workforce, augmenting pensions and healthcare, encouraging democratic relations with employees, it could be rewarded at tax time. This leverage would penalize bad behavior at the bottom line and reinforce the tattered regulatory laws. The performance ratings would be public—a "market signal" that tells investors and consumers which companies are the white hats and which are the rogues.

§ *Develop an industrial policy for essential needs.* Economic deregulation produced real economic gains, like stimulating technological innovation, but it also fed inequality in sly ways. The deregulated system raised costs for the least affluent, while larger business customers were able to bargain for lower prices. Financial deregulation (enacted by Democrats in 1980) legalized usurious lending and created a large pool of families (now around 12 million) who can't afford a bank account and get ripped off by predatory lenders. Deregulation of electric u tilities led to Enron and the price-rigging scandals. That sector, meanwhile, notoriously ignores its culpability for producing global warming.

The point is, some consumer goods are too essential to be left to the profit-seeking enthusiasms—and reckless disruptions—of private enterprise. People need them to live and are thus always prey to exploitation. Family finances will benefit and so will the environment if government selectively re-regulates industrial sectors producing for essential needs: banking and finance, energy, elements of transportation and telecommunications, for starters.

The basic approach is restoring a franchise relationship in which firms accept government-imposed obligations in exchange for limited competition and an assurance of moderate profits. Market space can be preserved for smaller, innovative firms. New rules can avoid the inflexibilities of the old system. But the notion that corporations have a right to annex common public assets and turn them into profitable commodities has to be stopped. Companies are buying the water. What's next—selling us clean air?

A prime candidate for essential-needs regulation is the drug industry. Among its many outrages, the drug companies ride free on the expensive basic research financed by government, then convert it into private, overpriced products—paying nothing at all back to the original financiers, the taxpayers. If citizens ever understood this scam, they would be angry enough to demand a nationalized drug industry. At the very least, citizens are entitled to reasonable pricing and a share of the profits from the medicine they paid to create.

Re-regulation of commerce also requires some rules accepted as everyday practice in business. When government hands out public money to a company, it should demand an enforceable contract: written agreement from the corporate recipient about what the public gets in return and the right to recover the money if the agreement isn't fulfilled. When government puts up public capital for a private development as tax breaks or infrastructure, it should get equity in return. If businesses don't like these terms, they don't have to take the public's money.

These ideas and others can gain political traction if reformers reclaim the language of freedom. It starts with a liberating message for people: The failure lies in the system, not yourselves. When the conservative order stripped away government protections for society, control was handed over to another master—the marketplace—that is even more remote from accountability and far less sympathetic to the human condition. That old order is collapsing. Now life and liberty can be restored. Government helps by creating the proper foundations. People will do the rest for themselves. ■

LETTERS
CONTINUED

(Continued From Page 2)
me personally was their intent.

Amazingly, in a little-noted but chilling comment, FBI spokesman John Miller has even claimed that First Amendment protections afforded to the press do not apply to universities—suggesting that this Administration thinks even less of academic freedom than it does of journalistic freedom. MARK FELDSTEIN

OF STEROIDS & HOT DOGS

Cottonwood, Ariz.

■ Worrying whether Barry Bonds uses steroids is like wondering how Wile E. Coyote can fall off that thousand-foot cliff and survive [Dave Zirin, "Sacrifice Play," May 15]. Who cares? This is pure Roman circus distraction. Don't the media have anything more pressing to concern themselves about, like global warming, government corruption or the ridiculous price of gasoline while Exxon records billions in profits? CARL NYE

Frankfort, Ky.

■ Babe Ruth versus Barry Bonds: Babe did (to a soft baseball) fat and drunk or hung over what Barry did on steroids. HANK MARKS

Milwaukee

■ What a laughable comparison! Barry Bonds did it on illegal steroids. Babe Ruth did it on hot dogs. E.A. RICHARDS

THE PAUSE THAT REPRESSES

Brooklyn, NY

■ Regarding the human rights records of Coke versus Pepsi ["Letters," May 22], one can go to www.responsibleshopper.org. It provides a snapshot of the global impact of major corporations on human rights, the environment, trade inequity and more. LEWIS FRIEDMAN

OUR PINK SLIP IS SHOWING

■ In Eric Alterman's June 12 "The Liberal Media" column, he mentioned 650 employees who have received pink slips over the past six months. They were from the entire Time Inc. enterprise, not just the magazine.

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

The Zionist Imagination

JACQUELINE ROSE

THE FIVE: A Novel of Jewish Life in Turn-of-the-Century Odessa.
By Vladimir Jabotinsky.
Translated by Michael R. Katz.
Cornell. 203 pp. Paper $17.95.

In 1917, after the British conquest of Palestine, the Jewish Battalion, which Vladimir Jabotinsky had campaigned for since the outbreak of World War I and which had participated in several of the battles, was allowed to rename itself the Judean Regiment. The regiment chose as its insignia a menorah with the Hebrew word "kadima," meaning "forward" or "eastward." This was not the first time Jabotinsky had used the word. Kadima was also the name of the Zionist publishing house he had founded with a group of friends in Odessa in 1904, which marked the beginning of Zionist activity throughout Russia. When, at the end of last year, Ariel Sharon left Likud to form a new party of the center-right, Kadima, a move widely welcomed as creating a fresh middle ground in Israeli politics, he was therefore paying the profoundest tribute to Jabotinsky—Likud's forefather, founder of militant Revisionist Zionism, visionary of the Jewish radical right.

After Theodor Herzl and David Ben-Gurion, Jabotinsky is perhaps the most renowned figure in Zionist history, although he remains more controversial. For the Labor Zionist founders of the State of Israel, he was a pariah. He split with the Zionist Organization on the issue of Jewish self-defense (he was imprisoned by the British in 1920 for possession of firearms and for provoking disorder) and of armed struggle against the British in Palestine. He had also proclaimed that the goal of Zionism was the creation of a Jewish state, at a time when Zionist leaders preferred to keep quiet about their aims. "I, too, am for a Jewish state," one of his closest collaborators commented, "but I am against using the *words*." Jabotinsky was ostracized for speaking the truth. Because he recognized Arab national aspirations as legitimate, he had no interest in denying that the Zionist struggle would be violent. According to Jabotinsky, a group of Arabs approached him in 1926: "You are the only one among the Zionists who has no intention of fooling us," Egyptian intellectual Mahmoud Azmi is reported as having thanked him for not disguising the true nature of his aims.

As I write, Israel is faced with a democratically elected Hamas government, the legacy of its own brute military policies toward the Palestinians. Behind Hamas's statement that it will not recognize Israel—for which it is isolated and financially starved—we can ironically detect the shade, and perfectly logical consequence, of the ethos of Jabotinsky, who famously ended his 1923 essay "The Iron Wall": "The only path to an agreement in the future is an absolute refusal of any attempts at an agreement now." There could be no agreement or even negotiation with the Arabs until they accepted that Zionism was invincible. For Jabotinsky inflexibility was political doctrine.

Vladimir Jabotinsky, founding father of right-wing Zionism, expressed profound doubts about his faith—in his novels.

Jabotinsky is most famous for creating the militant youth organization Betar, which he founded in 1923. Members of Betar saw themselves as warriors opposed to the laboring, agricultural spirit of the first socialist Zionist pioneers. In his book on Revisionist Zionism, *The Jewish Radical Right*, Eran Kaplan describes how the members of Betar took their inspiration from the early Zionist poet Ya'acov Cohen, who wrote:

Jacqueline Rose teaches at Queen Mary, University of London. Her books include On Not Being Able to Sleep: Psychoanalysis and the Modern World *and, most recently,* The Question of Zion.

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In blood and fire Judah fell
In blood and fire Judah will rise!
War! War to our country, war for freedom—
And if freedom is forever lost—long live revenge!

Although Betar eventually embraced a vision even more radical than that of Jabotinsky, and though his position proved too moderate for the founders of the Jewish underground movement Irgun, nonetheless Zionist militarism can fairly be described as starting with him. Jabotinsky was a fighter. His last, posthumously published book, *The Jewish War Front*, also published as *The War and the Jew*, recounted his attempt to persuade the Allied powers to allow the formation of a Jewish Army in World War II (creation of a Jewish state would then, he believed, acquire the status of an Allied war aim). "A nation in our position," he famously wrote in response to the 1936 Arab rebellion, "must know the ABC and acquire the psychology of shooting and the longing after it." Yet long before his belligerence was directed toward the Arabs, the target of his rage was the official Zionist leadership, which he disdained as insufficiently militant in relation to the British. In 1929 he described the "hatred" between himself and Labor Zionism as "organic": "It is not dependent on our will, and nothing can be done about it." Jabotinsky's first enemies were other Jews.

Strangely enough, it was a Labor Prime Minister, Levi Eshkol, who arranged for Jabotinsky's remains to be interred in a state ceremony on Mount Herzl in 1964. Full memorialization would have to await the election of Likud Prime Minister Menachem Begin in 1977, a watershed event in Israel's recent history. Celebrations for the 100th anniversary of Jabotinsky's birth were to match the commemoration of the first prime minister of Israel, David Ben-Gurion. Held in major cities across the country, the events were, as political scientist and anthropologist Myron Aronoff puts it, a "near deification" of Jabotinsky, marking his definitive return to the official Zionist fold. The afterword to a late edition of *The War and the Jew* cites Begin as he recalls the moment he issued the order for the revolt in 1937 against the British authorities in Palestine: "It was as though I heard the voice of Jabotinsky commanding me to give it. That is how we all felt. It was under his leadership, even after his death, that the Revolt was carried out." (Despite the eulogies, Begin found Jabotinsky too moderate, proclaiming at Betar's 1938 World Conference that Zionism had to pass through an era of military struggle, whereupon Jabotinsky turned his back, comparing Begin's speech to the sound of a screeching door.)

Jabotinsky's ability to inspire devotion in his followers is legendary. Members of his camp were known as Khoveve Jabotinsky (Lovers of Jabotinsky). Each one of them, writes Jabotinsky's biographer Joseph Schechtman, had his own "intimate and captivating romance with the man," a romance whose unwritten formula was "Jabotinsky belongs to the Jewish Nation and to me" or, more personally, "Jabotinsky belongs to me and to the Jewish Nation." Jabotinsky provides a perfect illustration of that strange process described by Freud whereby an intimate and potentially competing claim to possess the leader on the part of each of his followers nonetheless works to secure the cohesion of the group. According to Schechtman, when Jabotinsky moved from his luxury hotel in Alexandria, Egypt, into the quarantine quarters of Jewish exiles expelled by the Syrian leader from Jaffa during World War I—an uneasy group of Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews including Georgians, Bukharians and Spaniards, with twelve languages among them—"as if by magic, everything changed and the mixed crowd...became a single unit, giving the impression of a group which had been educated in the same orderly way. We called this order among exiles, 'the Jabotinsky régime.'"

Jabotinsky's followers were known as 'lovers of Jabotinsky,' and each had his own 'intimate and captivating romance with the man.'

Jabotinsky expected no less. "The greatest achievement of a free mass of people," he wrote with reference to Betar, "is the ability to operate together as one with the absolute precision of a machine.... We would like to turn the entire nation into such an orchestra." Dedication must be absolute: "Two ideals are an absurdity—like two gods, like two altars, two temples. I do not want to insult anybody, but a soul that can swallow two ideals and be content is a flawed soul.... An ideal excludes everything peripheral, however beautiful, however pure."

Yet for all his rhetoric about the need for a single ideal, Jabotinsky was driven by more than one. In a 1934 letter, on the eve of his split with the official Zionist Organization, he wrote to a friend: "There are only three solutions: to conquer the Zionist Organization, or to convert the Revisionist Organization into something very 'wrathful,' or to retire and write novels." Conquering the official Zionist Organization was, he acknowledged, impossible. The second two turned out, however, not to be alternatives. In 1935 Jabotinsky created his "wrathful" organization—the Independent, or New Zionist Organization. That same year he completed his last novel, *Pyatero*, or *The Five* (it had started appearing in installments in Paris in 1933), which has recently been translated into English for the first time by Michael Katz. *The Five* is the lovingly rendered account of the decline of Russian Jewry in cosmopolitan, turn-of-the-century Odessa, told, as the Russian literature specialist Alice Nakhimovsky observes, with "irreproducible careless grace." In his book *Zionism and the Fin de Siècle*, Michael Stanislawski, who provides the introduction to this edition, describes *The Five* as "the most literarily successful and the most psychologically revealing of Jabotinsky's adult writings."

What, we might ask, led Jabotinsky, at the precise moment he cast the die for violent Zionist activism, to turn to his own past (the narrator is clearly a self-portrait), into something "peripheral," "beautiful," thereby revealing the division or "flaw" in his own soul? Jabotinsky's Odessa is a utopia in decline, where "ten tribes converged" speaking "one hundred different languages," "each and every one so fascinating, one more interesting than the next," whose customs "gradually...rubbed up against each other" until they "ceased regarding their own sacred altars in such a serious manner." The reference to language is important. Throughout his life, Jabotinsky harbored a complex passion for languages. Although he is reputed to have spoken at least nine, he also devoted a significant part of his career as a Zionist to promoting the revival of Hebrew—one language for one people—in both the Diaspora and Palestine. In *The Five*, on the other hand, it becomes at least an open question whether the drive of history is toward the purity or the confusion of tongues. The narrator who tenderly records this world is a self-doubting Zionist. "Of course," he muses, "I'm in the camp that struggles against disintegration; I don't want neighbors; I want all people living on their own islands; but—who knows?"

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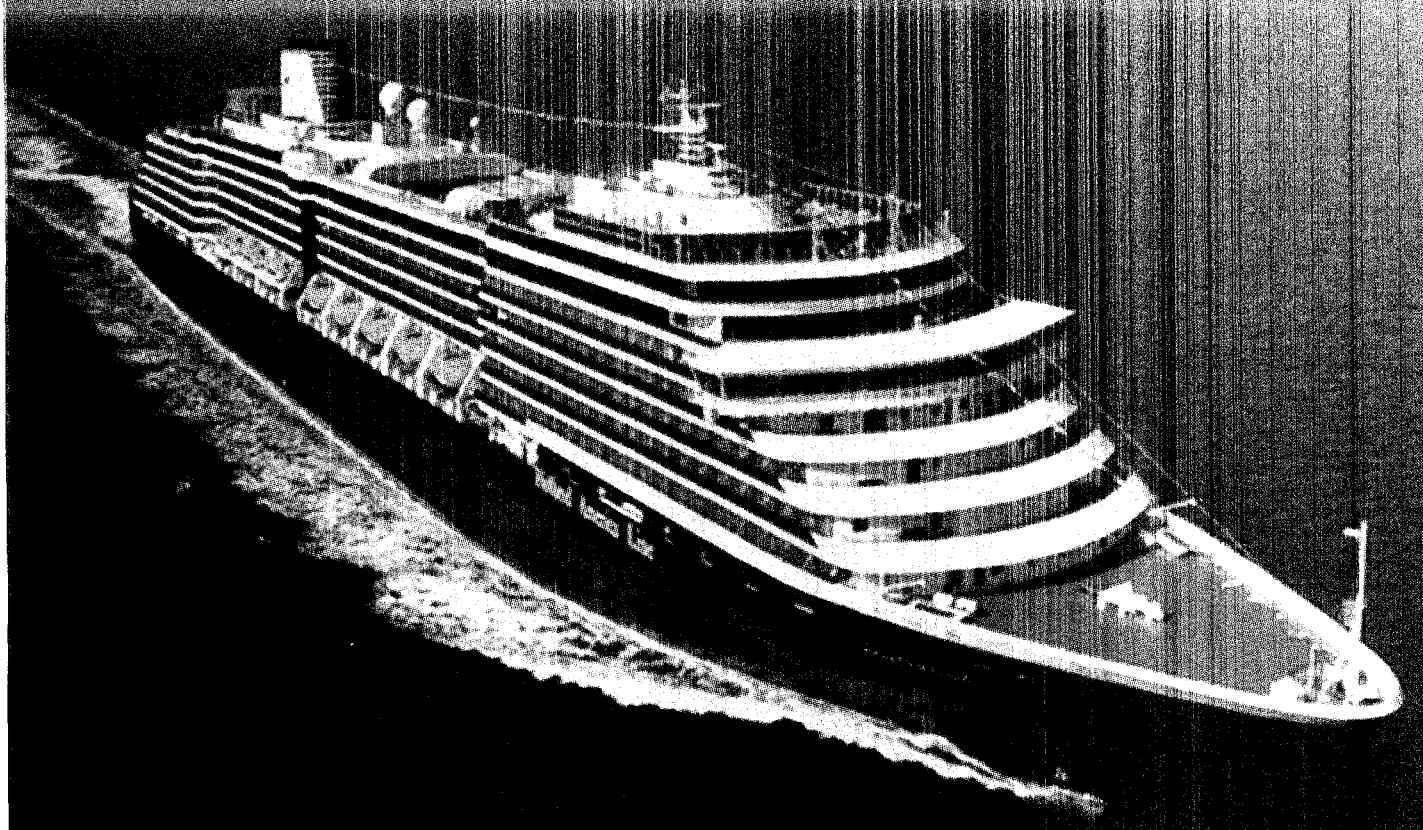

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Like Herzl, Jabotinsky was a journalist and literary writer before he became a Zionist at the start of the new century. One of the most renowned of such figures in Odessa, he was also a translator of Poe into Russian. Although his Zionist conversion predated the Kishinev pogrom of 1903, it was nonetheless a turning point. "Once I felt strongly the beauty of a free-lance," he wrote, "a man above and beyond the rank and file, having no allegiance, without obligation toward anyone on earth, impartial toward his own people and to strangers alike, pursuing the way of his own will over the heads of kin and strangers." But his newfound Zionist "faith," like the betrothal of a Jewish woman, required him to follow the "cruel but profound" custom of cutting off his hair: "Perhaps I too could...sing songs of beauty, bathe in the cheap favor of your applause. But I do not want it. I cut off my hair." Once again the rhetoric was undermined by his literary writing. In his first novel, *Prelude to Delilah or Samson the Nazarite*, published in 1926, cutting off one's hair brings vengeful retribution and is no act of pure self-enlightened grace, as if such a gesture were too brutal a repudiation, something that would not finally settle in the author's mind. According to Schechtman, to the end of Jabotinsky's life writing remained his greatest pleasure, the activity in which he felt most contented and at ease. On receiving the first copy of *The Five*, Jabotinsky wrote to his brother-in-law that he was so happy he "spent the whole day going from one movie house to another."

Jabotinsky did not, therefore, give up a literary career for politics, or relinquish the false path of fiction for the true Zionist faith. There is more at stake here than the fact that literature was Jabotinsky's first and abiding passion. Nor is it only a matter of the symbiotic relationship of Zionist literature and politics, the way that for Jabotinsky, as for Herzl, political reality is summoned to meet the dream. "Sometimes, the era produces the poet. Sometimes one creates the other," Menachem Begin wrote in his foreword to the 1986 edition of Schechtman's Jabotinsky biography. "But the poetry and the literary works of Ze'ev Jabotinsky preceded an era—he created it." Lacking the financial resources and institutions of official Zionism, Revisionism was always an ideological, cultural and literary enterprise. Revisionist Zionism can also be described, as Eran Kaplan details in *The Jewish Radical Right*, as an aesthetic project, steeped in the ceremonial and symbolic molding of the mass mind (it conducted what can be described at the very least as a flirtation with Italian Fascism). Even more crucially, as *The Five* so clearly shows, fiction trails Jabotinsky's political acts and rhetoric, belying their conviction, allowing us a glimpse of something darker that the rhetoric will not or cannot afford to let us see. For such a diagnosis, Jabotinsky himself provides the terms. "Every project presents a dark side," he wrote in *The Story of the Jewish Legion*, "every important remedy contains within itself an element which, under other circumstances, would be poisonous." The note that opens *The Five*, "Instead of a Preface," concludes: "I'm a child of my age.... I love all its blemishes, all its poison." Like a confessional, literature became the place where Jabotinsky could diagnose the ills of his own life's work.

Jabotinsky's fiction trails his political acts, offering a glimpse of something darker that the rhetoric will not or cannot afford to let us see.

Seen in this context, *The Five* is a discovery. In moments of startling prescience, Zionism appears not as immutable goal but as cause for warning or fear. Roughly halfway through the novel, the narrator, a detached cosmopolitan littérateur who moves, like the author, between Odessa, Rome and Bern, suddenly understands "the venomous curse of the emigrant's existence," which uses up the "soul's juice" in torment. "But," he continues, "the soul's juice is not reabsorbed; it accumulates, hardens, and burns the consciousness forever; and if fate ever wills it thus and the exiles en masse suddenly return to their homeland and become its sovereigns, they will pervert all paths and all measures."

In Jabotinsky's lexicon, even iron, we discover, is a mixed blessing, or curse. At the end of *Samson*, the blind imprisoned hero sends a message to his people: "Samson thought for a while, and then said slowly: 'Tell them two things in my name—two words. The first word is iron. They must get iron.... The second word is this: a king!'" But in 1925, the year before this novel was published, Jabotinsky had written a collection of short stories, *A Pocket Edition of Several Stories Mostly Reactionary*, which includes the tale of Tristan da Runha, a penitentiary colony of exiled convicts, the most atavistic representatives of the human race, who slowly turn their island into a model of human dignity and survival, in the words of the observer telling the story, "a superior, better world than the one left behind." No metal ores or coal deposits are allowed on the island; when the buildings evacuated by the previous population are destroyed, "especial care had been taken to remove any trace of metal even such as old nails." Tristan da Runha is an "ironless civilization"—remember, this is only two years after "The Iron Wall" and "The Ethics of the Iron Wall," both published in 1923. It lacks "the only materials over which man is absolute master, which he can mold into any shape, and link together into infinite combinations to do his will." In this lies the colony's superiority to the civilized world: "Metal is the cause of all evil.... It is dangerous for man to become so absolute a master of Nature. It is unnatural, and will be avenged.... We who were born in the world of iron shall soon die; and the generations conceived on this island will never know the morbid ambitions, the lust of pawing new things which poison that world." And then, in lines it is hard not to read once again as Jabotinsky's caution against his own hardening faith (in a letter written as he resigned from the Zionist Organization, he suggested that Chaim Weizmann was on the path to "apostasy"): "The field of the spirit is the only field where man has the right to conquer, to advance over hedge after hedge.... However high he may soar in the spirit, his daring will not be avenged, he will not degenerate—so long as he does not attempt to transform spirit into matter, in the shape of more acres or more power." Iron and power are destructive; together they corrupt the spirit of mankind. Jabotinsky, we could say, knew exactly what he was doing, although perhaps not in the way usually assumed, when he evoked the metaphor of the iron wall as the surest path—more acres, hedge after hedge—to the conquest of Palestine.

The Five tells the tragic story of the Milgroms, a successful Jewish grain merchant's family with five children, whose disintegration, helplessly watched and recorded by the narrator, chimes with the outbreak of revolution in Russia in 1905. From Potemkin Day onward, this family "that had become like my own family" is surrounded by a "dark plague." The star of the family, the beautiful, flirtatious Marusya—"I've yet to encounter any young woman better than Marusya"—dies in a careless domestic fire. Serezha, the "scamp," is disfigured by acid when his liaison with a semi-incestuous mother-daughter couple is discovered by the former's husband. Marko, who loves Nietzsche but is viewed by his father as a fool, dies when he tries to

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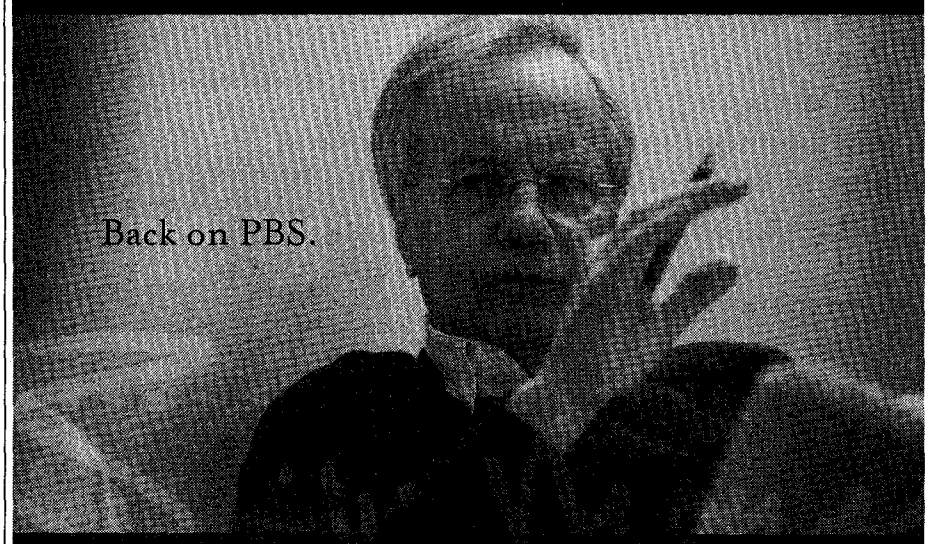
rescue a woman he wrongly believes to be drowning in a frozen lake. Lika, arrested for anti-czarist agitation and sent into exile, becomes an agent for the secret police, although the intimation at the end of the book is that she is a Bolshevik and Cheka executioner. Studious Torik, the ideal child in the eyes of his parents, whose library includes Grätz's *History of the Jews*—"the single book with Jewish content in the entire household"—shockingly converts at the end of the novel, although not before graciously warning his father in case he should wish to disinherit him. "My diagnosis is established irrevocably: disintegration," Torik explains to the narrator. "The Jewish people is dispersing every which way, and it won't ever return to its previous state." For Torik, Zion will not exist and Zionism is simply hastening the Jews on their path to assimilation, with "conversions, mixed marriages, and the complete annihilation of the race": "only one thing will remain—the desire 'to be like all other peoples.'" This is in itself heavily ironic, since the desire to be like other peoples, not through assimilation but through entry into the world of nations, was central to the Zionist drive to become a mono-ethnic Jewish state.

The tragedy of the Milgrom family is therefore the tragedy of assimilation and incipient Bolshevism. Although as a young man, Jabotinsky called himself a socialist, and in *The Five* he is clearly on the side of anti-autocratic sedition, he came to loathe the Russian Revolution for tearing the Jews away from other, nationalist ideals (remember, only one ideal). A revolution in another nation was not, as he saw it, worth "the blood of our old men, women, and children." If the novel is in praise of revolt, nonetheless the Milgroms make the fundamental error of believing they can lead a fully Russian life. In his 1908 article "Jews in Russian Literature," Jabotinsky addressed an assimilated socialist writer of Jewish origin "who enthusiastically pledged allegiance to the Russian people and Russian culture.... You went over to the rich neighbor—we will turn our backs on his beauty and kindness; you worship his values and have left our little patrimony to rot.... We will exaggerate our hatred to make it help our love." Once again, such violent repudiation can only be suspect. Placing love in such proximity to hatred is a risky game. Sadism, as Jabotinsky wrote on the subject of anti-Semitism in *The War and the Jew*, cannot bear to lose its object, never lets go. Repugnance is a binding tie. In 1935 the result of such exaggerated, fondly nurtured hatred would be to return him to the assimilated Jews of Odessa with a passion.

Everyone in czarist Russia "except the tsar himself," writes Yuri Slezkine in *The Jewish Century*, belonged to a group that was in some way the target of discrimination; nonetheless, the Jews were "first among nonequals." At the dawn of the twentieth century, the Russian Empire was home to most of the world's Jews, who formed the largest and most urbanized group of those who could make no claim to a national home. Although Jabotinsky eventually saw the education he had interrupted (and subsequently completed) as the Jewish ticket out of the Pale, he had in fact, like many of the Jews in Odessa, never been there. He was typical as a literary-minded Russian-speaking Jew with virtually no ties to Jewish tradition or culture. According to Stanislawski, it was far from abnormal for an upper-middle-class Russian Jew to be raised with no knowledge of Yiddish, Hebrew or Judaism. Before he discovered Zionism, Jabotinsky could therefore be described as a Jew who "passed." When he eventually introduced a "religious plank" into the Zionist Organization at the Vienna Congress of 1935, the move was as much political as sacred (or rather the two combined). By this stage Jabotinsky's explicit revolutionary aim was to make his or-

"The Bible, thank God, is not politically correct."
—David Grossman

Bill Moyers
on FAITH & REASON



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ganization the embodiment of the totality of the Jewish people; for this it would be folly to ignore a "factor of such magnitude as thirty centuries of religious inspiration and thought." "We need," he wrote to his son two days after the Congress, "religious pathos as such."

But Jabotinsky did not believe in the veracity of the Bible and, as Ya'acov Shavit has related, in all his writings there is not one reference to God's covenant with Abraham, the Exodus, the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai or indeed the conquering of Eretz Israel by the Israelites. Jabotinsky's Zionism is shorn of Jewishness even when he appeals to sacred tradition as having a part to play in the forging of the national (racial) mind. To this extent it is arguable whether the demise of the Milgroms in *The Five* can be traced to their betrayal of their Jewish identity and spiritual legacy, or whether Zionism itself—or rather Jabotinsky's Zionism—arose at least partially not just out of the desire to be free of an increasingly violent anti-Semitism but paradoxically also from a longing to leave the Jewish legacy and world behind. Better get out, if a family as beautiful and talented as the Milgroms—carrying the forlorn hope for the Jews of a civilized European life—cannot survive. The novel does not judge; it laments. Seen in these terms, Jabotinsky's Odessa is less a prelude to Zion than its rival—as the publication of this novel in the year he founds the New Zionist Organization suggests—one that persists in his mind even when its world has vanished. The city rises up as a counter-utopia to his own chosen destiny, a lost paradise rather than a mistake. This gives an added dimension to the acknowledged role in Zionism of contempt for the Diaspora Jew, as it does to the Zionist fantasy of creating an outpost of Western civilization in the East. It was because the Jews could not fulfill the true dream—to assimilate in Europe—that they were so determined to travel as Europeans to Palestine.

Might there be inside Jabotinsky's project, therefore, a core of hatred, as much as love, for the Jews? ("We will exaggerate our hatred to make it help our love.") When the narrator takes up a career in public service ("Secretary in the Temporary Administration of the Society of Sanatorium Colonies and Other Hygienic-Dietary Institutions for the Treatment and Education of Students Suffering From Bad Health From the Indigent Jewish Population in the City of Odessa and Its Surrounding Areas"), Marusya offers to accompany him to visit these impoverished, indigent Jews. "Would you like to get away from all these Jews?" she asks at the end of a visit that has at once dismayed and exhilarated her, "both rich and poor?" And accompanying her sister Lika into exile in Volgoda, she writes home to the narrator: "Don't forget to remind me when I return to join some political party or other, just as long as there are no Jews in it" (remember, she is the best woman he has ever known). Slezkine tells the story of Esther Ulanovskaia, who came to Odessa from a *shtetl* in the Ukraine and joined the Young Revolutionary International: "The Jews represented the world I wanted to get away from."

In his autobiography, Jabotinsky cites his first "Zionist" speech, delivered in Bern in 1898: "I am a Zionist, without a doubt, since the Jews are a very terrible people, its neighbors justly hate them" (not surprisingly, it was received as anti-Semitic). According to Schechtman, Count Michael Lubiensky once said to him: "You know that I hold Jabotinsky in highest regard and that my opinion of Weizmann is trimmed accordingly.... Dr. Weizmann has all the chances to retain the allegiance of the majority of the Jewish people. Because his entire mentality is identical with that of an average ghetto Jew, while the mentality of Jabotinsky is spiritually nearer to me, a Gentile. I understand him better; he evokes in me a kindred response." Jabotinsky turned to the assimilated Jews of Russia in 1935 because he still belonged to them. As with his Odessa, so with his Zionism, there was no trace of Pale or ghetto.

If *The Five* tells the other story of Jabotinsky's official Zionism, to read this novel is nonetheless to be struck by how closely these seemingly contrary visions are intertwined, not just in the sense that the failure of assimilation was in some sense the cause of Zionism but rather because the question of assimilation was carried over to the issue of the rights of indigenous peoples, which Zionism was confronting in relation to the Arabs of Palestine. It is often asked how a people who suffered such persecution could become the oppressors of another people. Faced with Lika's exile, her father, Ignats Albertovich, "found many quotations in Heine and Borne to prove that it's more shameful to be an oppressor than a victim." But despite the barely concealed irony at Albertovich's expense, Jabotinsky showed his own awareness of the link when he proposed for the Arabs the same minority rights that he had promoted at the Helsingfors Third All-Russian Zionist Convention of 1906 for Russian Jews: Zionism was ready "to grant the Arab minority in Eretz Israel every possible right that the

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Jews claimed for themselves, but had never achieved in other countries."

For Jabotinsky Arab national aspirations, like those of the Zionists, were legitimate. Hence his acknowledgment of the inevitable violence of the struggle. Antagonism between Jew and Arab therefore veiled a latent identification. Unlike those Zionists who blithely predicted, with a barely concealed racism, that the Arabs would relinquish their land when they saw how the Jewish pioneers made the desert bloom, he insisted that they were a people of dignity who would not be bought: "The entire country is full of Arab memories." National groupings cannot, therefore, but be at war with each other. In *The War and the Jew*, he makes a key distinction between the "Anti-Semitism of Men," based on irrational, visceral hatred ("a subjective repulsion, strong enough and permanent enough to become anything from a hobby to a religion," "a constant urge to harm the hated race"), and the "Anti-Semitism of Things" ("steady, constant and immutable, and therefore much more formidable"), which follows from the natural desire to protect, and foster, the interests of one's own kind: "an instinct which cannot be criticized because, after all, it is as natural as preferring one's own children to one's neighbor's offspring." Zionist and Arab therefore share a natural hostility to each other. Once again the fiction tells another story. "It is a good thing that you should live for a time among the Philistines," Samson says to one of his followers. "They are our neighbors, and if men come to know each other, there is no more enmity between them."

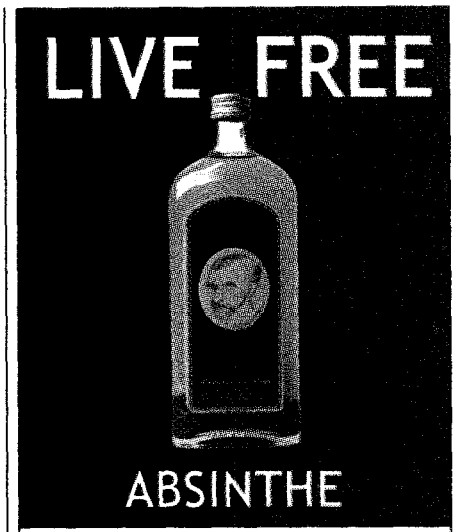
In Jabotinsky's future, Arab and Jew would not be neighbors so much as carefully differentiated groupings within the body politic of the new state. We are a far cry from *The Five*'s "good-natured fraternization of nationalities," the "Babylonian diversity of our common forum" in which the narrator took such naïve but wholesome delight. Arabs might be citizens, they might even participate in government (once they had submitted, there could even be an Arab vice president), but only the Jews would fully belong to the nation. Behind the apparently liberal demand for Arab minority rights lies a plea for the separation of peoples. Jabotinsky has transposed to Palestine the exact arrangement whose utter nonviability for the Jews he knew only too well: "every possible right that the Jews... had never achieved in other countries." "The Helsingfors utopia has, of course, never been attained either in Russia or anywhere else," he wrote in his 1930 essay "Binational Palestine." "I trust that the first country where they will, some day, be fully applied will be our own Palestine—that is, when we Jews shall have become its masters."

If there is an affinity between Arab and Jew, such a form of recognition shows its darker side. The line from Odessa to Tel Aviv, from failed assimilation to national identity, can be run more ways than one. For if there can only be one sovereign people, why would the Arabs, any more than the Jews in Russia, want to stay? Slowly, as Jewish emigration to Palestine from Europe increased throughout the 1930s, Jabotinsky's vision turned toward the transfer of peoples. Not forcibly—he was outspoken against forcible transfer—but nonetheless as the consequence, ironically, of his own belief in Arab nationhood. As Shavit points out, there was an inherent contradiction in the official Revisionist position, which rejected the idea of a pan-Arab nation while maintaining that the Palestinian Arabs could be effortlessly absorbed into the larger Arab world (a contradiction all the more intense in that they refused to recognize the Hashemite regime in Transjordan, and hence the Transjordanian nation that was meant to receive them). Somewhat at odds with his own movement, Jabotinsky had no such problem with the larger pan-Arab vision—and, if there was a greater Arab nation, why should they not leave? According to Edward Norman, recording a conversation about a possible transfer of Palestinian Arabs to Iraq, Jabotinsky made the truly "original suggestion" that

> it would be wise to have the Zionist Organization openly oppose Arab emigration from Palestine, and then the Arabs would be sure the scheme was not Jewish and that the Jews wanted them to stay in Palestine only to exploit them, and they would want very much to go away to Iraq.

This is a deadly repetition of Freud's famous joke of two Jews at the railway station: "If you say you're going to Krakow, you want me to believe you're going to Lemberg. But I know in fact you're going to Krakow! So why are you lying to me?" (The standard edition of Freud's works indexes this joke as "Truth a lie.")

Jabotinsky believed in the power of words. "Many an observer shares the view," he wrote in his introduction to an English translation of the famous Hebrew poet Chaim Nachman Bialik, "that among the impulses which have determined the Jewish revival since 1896, the personalities of Herzl and Bialik were the two main factors, more powerful than any 'objective' event of those days." Jabotinsky had translated into Russian Bialik's most famous poem, "In the City of Slaughter," written in response



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to the Kishinev pogrom: "The self-defense organizations which sprang up everywhere in Russia to meet the new pogrom-wave two years later, the 'Yeomanry' movement in Palestine, even the Jewish Legion which fought for the Holy Land in 1918—they are all Bialik's children." To Bialik's poem he attributes almost mystical, telepathic powers. Stanislawski recounts how, in Jabotinsky's rendering—retitled "Tale of a Pogrom"—the original is stripped of its heterodox, subversive, not to say blasphemous, content (the speaker of the poem is an impotent, self-castigating God) as well as of its biblical and Judaic lexicon, to re-emerge as a diatribe against the Jewish people's passivity in the face of suffering, and an invocation to revolt: "Bialik revolts, and becomes a singer of triumphant, invincible, rebellious Manhood, of the arm that wields the sword, of muscles of granite and sinews of steel." "The main lesson of the pogrom was shame." In his 1920 "Letter to the Jewish Community," one of two proclamations issued by the "Prisoners of Acre," he lambastes the criminal conduct of Weizmann and "our own Zionist administration" for turning a blind eye to slaughter, condemning the Jewish people to "moral shame": "He had stifled the outbursts of protest until the impudence of our enemies grew and ripened and took deep roots, and we became *hefker* [ownerless property] in their eyes."

For Jabotinsky, therefore, as for many Zionists, militancy was the answer not only to persecution and injustice but also to humiliation. It is a recurrent theme throughout Zionist writing and, I believe, the key to much of Zionism's own ruthlessness toward the Palestinians, that persecution of the Jews was experienced as moral disgrace. What is short-circuited in this logic is grief. "I will harden My heart," God addresses his "mournful and slinking" followers in Bialik's poem. "I will not let thee weep!" "Thy tear, son of man, remain unshed!/ Build thou about it, with thy deadly hate/ Thy fury and thy rage, unuttered,/A wall of copper, the bronze triple plate!" Bialik has laid on the Jewish people an injunction from which the new nation will not recover—redemption of the people on condition of an inability to mourn. Echoing Bialik at the end of *The Five*, the narrator rages at the funeral of Marusya against the prayers in praise of "God-the-offender": "I'd cast a stone at You, oh Lord, if You weren't hiding so far away."

Marusya dies when her dress catches fire in the kitchen. In a truly heroic moment, which looks forward to the vision of self-sacrificing Zionist motherhood, she locks her son outside the door and, to avoid any temptation of fleeing and thereby endangering him, throws the key from the window, barring all escape. In an extraordinary hallucinatory passage, the narrator—who insists that he never dreams—responds to a strange request she had once made, that he should "dream me." He relives her last moments, shedding their heroic content and entering her tunnel of pain, where, we are now told, there was no time to think of her son because pain is such "a terribly nasty, completely insane thing": "Has it ever entered your head that 'pain' is a repulsive, demeaning concept? It's the most passive suffering on earth, somehow servile: you mean nothing at all, no one asks you, someone's mocking you." On the other hand, Marusya's father, in response to the tragedy, claims to understand the book of Job—which the narrator has never read—for the first time: Better to submit to suffering than rebel against God, otherwise your pain is worthless. Does suffering ennoble or debase? In the pages of the novel, this is not a question that has to or can be settled. But as with George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*, which also fails to bind the loose ends of its own drama, the reader is led to understand that the only future out of an intolerable impasse will be the journey to Zion.

The end of *The Five* suggests that the question of how to respond to suffering was something Jabotinsky was never able to answer. It is as if the only options he could imagine were impotent, humiliating self-sacrifice or militant, invincible rage. But unless this deadlock can be broken, with all its dire consequences for Palestinian Arabs and Israel as a nation, the conflict in the Middle East has no chance of being resolved. To recall, finally, Weizmann's letter to Jabotinsky of 1915, in which Weizmann asked him how he could bear to be so hated: Jabotinsky seems to have thrived on such hatred, risen to it, as we might say. *The Five* tells the other story. It allows us to watch his love traveling elsewhere—back to Odessa, in a last fleeting gesture to a world that he helped put the seal on for all time.

In Jabotinsky's writing, Zionism both affirms and doubts itself. What would Israel look like today if the modern leaders who have claimed to take their inspiration from him—Begin, Netanyahu, Sharon and now Olmert, who referred to Jabotinsky in his speech to the first session of the new Knesset at the beginning of May—had shown themselves capable of such radical self-questioning? ■

Boxed In

VINCE PASSARO

IN PERSUASION NATION. By George Saunders. Riverhead. 228 pp. $23.95.

If you are a new reader of George Saunders, the first thing you ought to know is that Saunders is the funniest writer in America, more likely to make you laugh in public, if that's where you're reading his books, than any writer since P.G. Wodehouse. The competition—David Sedaris, Tom Wolfe, Christopher Buckley—isn't even close.

It is easy, therefore, to pigeonhole Saunders, to think of him largely as a wit and an absurdist extraordinaire. This would be to miss his point. Saunders's laughs are a cover, a diversion, beneath which reside some profoundly serious intentions regarding the morality of how we live and the power of love and immanent death to transform us into vastly better creatures than we could otherwise hope to be. These are the biggest intentions an artist can have.

Among younger writers these days, Saunders has many imitators. He often writes with great wit and affection about working-class people and the situations of nonsensical hardship they face. With so few writers left in the United States qualified (and willing) to cover this terrain, Saunders ends up attracting some disciples simply along class lines. But class is not his main concern. His main concerns are much harder to pin down—unlike writers who often can be successfully imitated, say Ann Beattie or Raymond Carver, Saunders does not work in the mainstream tradition of North American short fiction, nor does he have a simple style, though it may sometimes appear so. His sensibility, always a close relative of style, is exclusively his own, sophisticated, daring and politically unusual, to the degree that one can't really imitate him unless one believes what he believes—everything he does is in service of an immovably unique worldview. In this

Vince Passaro's nonfiction has appeared in The New York Times Magazine, Harper's *and many other publications. His novel* Violence, Nudity, Adult Content, *was published in 2002.*

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as in several other ways, Saunders reminds me of Flannery O'Connor, which is to say he is a radical, and only a small number of people who really understand the convictions behind his work—the caustic humor that, pulled back, reveals a scouring contempt for consumer society and modern life, as well as a deep and specifically religious eagerness for transcendent meaning—would choose to embrace them.

Saunders's previous works include the short novel *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil* and the story collections *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* and *Pastoralia*. *In Persuasion Nation*, his new book of stories, is no mere compilation of pieces. Nor is the book a grouping of "related" stories. It's more like a stack of armaments. He has divided the collection into four parts, each section numbered and headed by a long fictional "excerpt" from a text of Saunders's invention called *Taskbook for the New Nation*, by one Bernard "Ed" Alton (the quoted "Ed" is a typical Saunders gesture, a couple of ink strokes revealing what is often ridiculous in our cultural habits and chosen identities). It's a brilliant piece of faux right-wing philosophy, full of blowsy declarations about our imagined "enemies" and how to combat them, which entails, in the fictional pundit's view, complete moral flexibility, bending our principles to whatever form may be necessary for our continued prosperity and strength; indeed, the whole book is a symphony on the destruction of individuality and honor that follows our tendency to do just as old "Ed" recommends. The strongest stories in the book start in Saunders's realm of surreal comedy but end in nuanced revelations of the terror and longing that lie beneath the surface of contemporary American life, a terror and longing that Saunders strongly associates with the consumer mega-culture that has become our only national milieu.

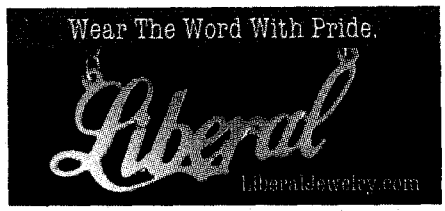
Fortunately, Saunders need not make this point didactically: His extraordinary imagination finds stability and credibility in his talents as a mimic of all the tonalities of contemporary American public language. He does working-class sad-sack narrators and stories in the form of documents (such as "93990," which takes the form of a lab report on the effects of toxins used on monkeys for the benefit of science)—and by the end of the book one has the sense that there is no dialect that Saunders can't reproduce on the page. In "Jon" he displays a perfect mastery of an idiom you might call talk-radio-white—grammatically confused and fueled entirely by received phrase-packages and muddy ideas:

> Back in the time of which I am speaking, due to our Coordinators had mandated us, we had all seen that educational video of *It's Yours to Do With What You Like!* in which teens like ourselfs speak on the healthy benefits of getting off by oneself and doing what one feels like in terms of self-touching, which what we learned from that video was, there is nothing wrong with self-touching, because love is a mystery but the mechanics of love need not be, so go off alone, see what is up, with you and your relation to your own gonads, and the main thing is, just have fun, feeling no shame!

In Persuasion Nation moves steadily forward with a growing sense of authorial anger and oddly tenacious religiosity, in a series of morally outraged fables gorgeously clothed in idiom and humor. "Brad Carrigan, American," like the title piece, first ran in *Harper's*, rather than *The New Yorker*, which usually publishes Saunders—one senses that Saunders has ventured into territory *The New Yorker* is not quite ready to handle. Both stories address an extraordinary fictional terrain: characters alive and struggling not in what would qualify as even the most fantastically imagined earthly locale, past or future, but within television programming. Not actors in a television show or commercial, mind you, but actual characters who live inside the realm of the super-reality we watch on TV.

"In Persuasion Nation" depicts a series of characters in television commercials, most memorably a polar bear who must, over and over, as often as an ad commonly runs on television, enact a scene in which he attempts to steal some Cheetos from an igloo, and an Eskimo (who like the polar bear is a reluctant actor, trapped in this repetitive narrative) catches him and axes him in the head. In the other story, Brad Carrigan is a confused husband to Doris in some kind of sitcom replete with a wacky neighbor and various family relations. Plot changes and transformations of the physical landscape keep occurring, we gather, as the network determines new ways to keep the show popular. At one inspired moment, the backyard becomes a mass of writhing, talking corpses from some Central Asian ethnic slaughter. Brad worries about the corpses, trying to calm his increasingly troubled conscience, but everyone else just wants to get along in the dumb-happy realm they've been given: There is no grief in a laugh-tracked world.

And they're not only on TV; they watch TV, too: At one point the extended family dines and takes in a report on babies in



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Africa born with AIDS. Needless to say, they quickly change the channel, settling instead on a channel advertising a new program called *Kill the Ho*. Each section of the story ends with a "We see" narrative device that introduces a commercial break—for example, "We see from the concerned look on Brad's face, and the way he throws back his chair, and the concerned look Doris shoots him for throwing back his chair in the middle of dinner, that it's time for a commercial"—which is Saunders's way of reminding us that, fictionally speaking, we're watching a television program while at the same time we're inside the consciousness of a fictional character who happens to be a character in that program.

One feels strongly that Saunders is doing something entirely new here. With these two stories and a band of others in this book, he has achieved a kind of twenty-first-century American magical realism. And magical realism, as Joan Didion once observed, and Gabriel García Márquez confirmed in his Nobel lecture, had a realistic purpose, reality itself in Latin America in those years having become "magical" all on its own. Any serious depiction of actual life essentially required this treatment. So it has become for us, and Saunders is the only prominent writer who has fully recognized the fact. Many of his stories reveal a truth that we prefer to spend most of our time hiding from: that in the United States today, for a person with an active conscience, full participation in daily economic and social life has become increasingly a schizophrenic and impossible act.

Saunders's way out of this dilemma, and the counterpoint to his ingenious comedy, resides in a growing spiritual dimension in his work, a spirituality that reaches its peak in the collection's final piece, "CommComm." CommComm, an office on an Air Force base, stands for "community communications." The narrator's specialty is PIDS, an acronym for a public information instrument, something like a press release but involving more media—PowerPoint, themed coloring books, etc. The pace of misdeeds at the base, however, soon makes such PR Band-Aid work pointless. Meanwhile, on the personal front, the narrator has other problems, largely embodied in the ghosts of his mother and father, who inhabit his house and spend their nights in extreme agitation, flitting from the couch to the top of the stairs, spinning around the floor lamp and bouncing around the kitchen in a state of increasing distress. It turns out they were brutally murdered by two otherwise unexplained Latvians who showed up in this Air Force base town somewhere in Middle America. Mom and Dad don't know they are dead and are trapped in harrowing nights of reliving their violent demise. During the day they hide in the decorative turret at the top of their small-town home. The narrator tells us:

> I climbed up once, then never again: jaws hanging open, blank stares, the two of them sitting against the wall, insulation in their hair, holding hands.
>
> "Have a good one," I shout at the turret as I leave for work.
>
> Which I know is dumb, but still.

Of all the remarkable moments in this book, none quite matches the end of this story, in which the narrator is murdered along with Giff, another Air Force base employee (they're killed by a colleague trying to keep his job). They too become ghosts, and in some complicated mathematics of Saunders's ghostdom, Giff manages to "free" the narrator's parents and the narrator himself, so that they can stop haunting the world and go where they belong. Saunders depicts them making their passages to the realm of the dead:

> We go. Snow passes through us, gulls pass through us. Tens of towns, hundreds of towns stream by below, and we hear their prayers, grievances, their million signals of loss. Secret doubts shoot up like tracers, we sample them as we fly through: a woman with a too-big nose, a man who hasn't closed a sale in months, a kid who's worn the same stained shirt three days straight, two sisters worried about a third who keeps saying she wants to die. All this time we grow in size, in love, the distinction between Giff and me diminishing, and my last thought before we join something I can only describe as Nothing-Is-Excluded is, Giff, Giff, please explain, what made you come back for me?

Again, one thinks of Flannery O'Connor, of her uncompromising sense of comedy and the hard tragedy and undying hope she always revealed beneath it. One of her greatest stories, "Revelation," features a vision reminiscent of Saunders's: a prissy and preposterous farm wife suddenly shown, as she hoses down her concrete pig pen, a stream of bodies rising toward heaven. Nowadays, in a time of the most limited sense of possibility and ambition in American literature, where even the discussion of the requirements of art, as opposed to success, feels obsolete and embarrassing, I can't think of another writer who would try to do what Saunders is doing, or anything close to it. This is an important book. ■

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PUZZLE NO. 3040

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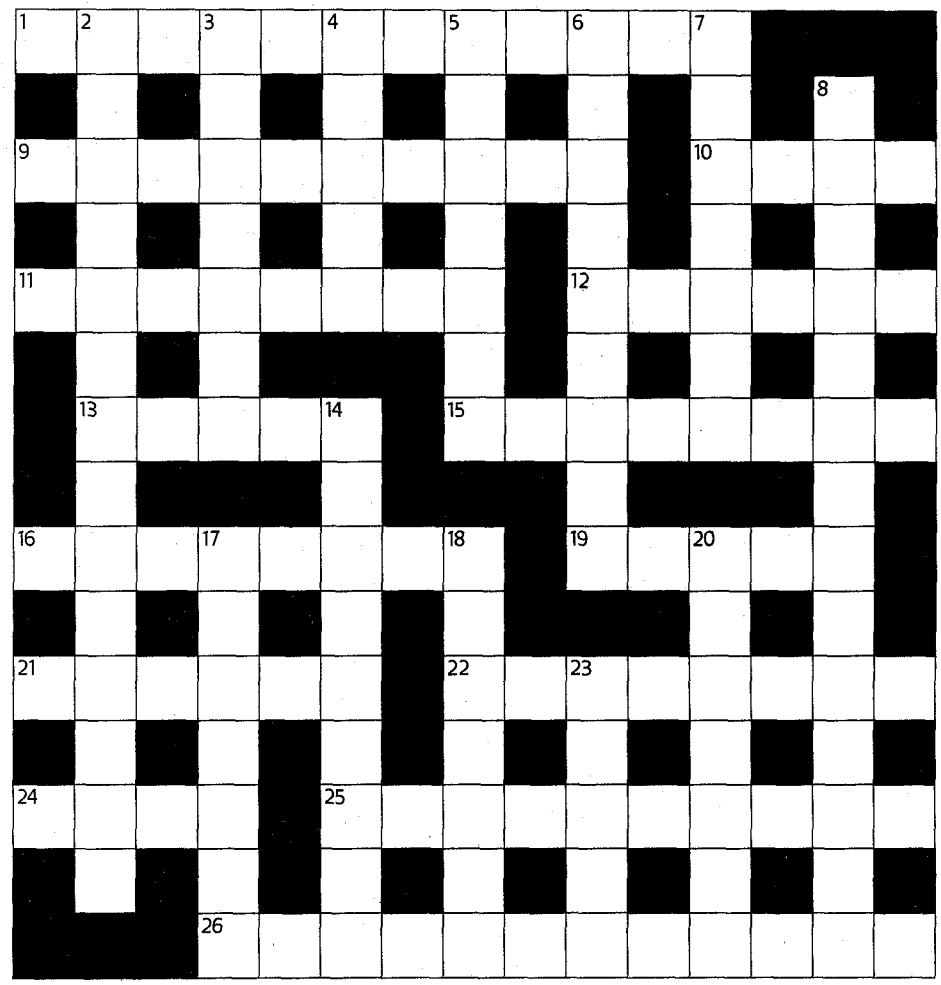

ACROSS

1 It means outside the main course in Paris. (4,8)

9 Is the notice only the male type fit to a T? It takes a little tinkering! (10)

10 A Tiger associated with a pan, properly, but pretty when growing up. (4)

11 Were found in the shifting sand, and made a comeback. (8)

12 One of species was important—at least as a beginning. (Alternatively, I declare I've won at the table.) (6)

13 Short for a follower of Jah—possibly a star performance implied. (5)

15 In this, everything is mixed up, and possibly said to have a little transportation on your head. (8)

16 Supposedly they can tell you what's about to happen with the gypsy chic sort to reveal it. (8)

19 Did she have cold feet in the crossing, and possibly lie with the Alpha and Omega reversed? (5)

21 The nasty fellow wears a messy bib, being a novel runner. (6)

22 Treats it with confusion, most slovenly. (8)

24 Exposition, perhaps, of the blond type, which is proper. (4)

25 Modulation of the voice, with the beginning of physical trouble about fifty. (10)

26 Does what the best dancer does, in the old "walk"—as we say it does when the outcome is unforeseen. (5,3,4)

DOWN

2 Just an average sailing type? (8,6)

3 How the squirrel starts to get what a hawk ends up with—like Polly does at times. (7)

4 The wrong route to get to a certain space. (5)

5 Upset because things sound like they are added this way? (7)

6 Perhaps turns up as a rather terse arrangement about ours, in a way. (9)

7 Sold to the first person at the emergency room, probably in service. (7)

8 Evidently exhausted with the usual eight-hour stint—but some people shrug their shoulders with it. (3,2,1,4,4)

14 The way some Londoners complain about the fog—which is a little silly! (1,3,5)

17 Tom goes around naked in the show-place! (7)

18 Fires from above fare badly in little streets. (7)

20 I would stand on 10 with a shaky end, which is absurd! (7)

23 Where the drive might start at the end, being pointless—proving quite a mouthful. (5)

PUZZLED? No more cross words. If you don't see why "Lures" are "Ground Rules" send for those of Mr. Lewis to: Puzzled, The Nation, 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003, or access our website at www.thenation.com/about/crossword.mhtml.

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3039

	A	R	C	H	I	T	E	C	T	U	R	E		
B		O		E		U		O		G		N		S
L	O	T	H	A	I	R		U	N	L	A	T	C	H
U		A		D		B		R		I		R		O
N	A	T	A	L		O	N	T	H	E	M	E	N	U
D		E		E		P				R		A		L
E	A	S	Y	S	T	R	E	E	T		S	T	U	D
R				S		O		I		S				E
B	A	T	S		U	P	I	N	T	H	E	A	I	R
U		A		A				S		A		B		B
S	I	M	U	L	C	A	S	T		N	A	S	A	L
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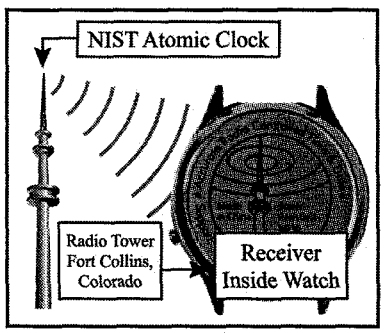

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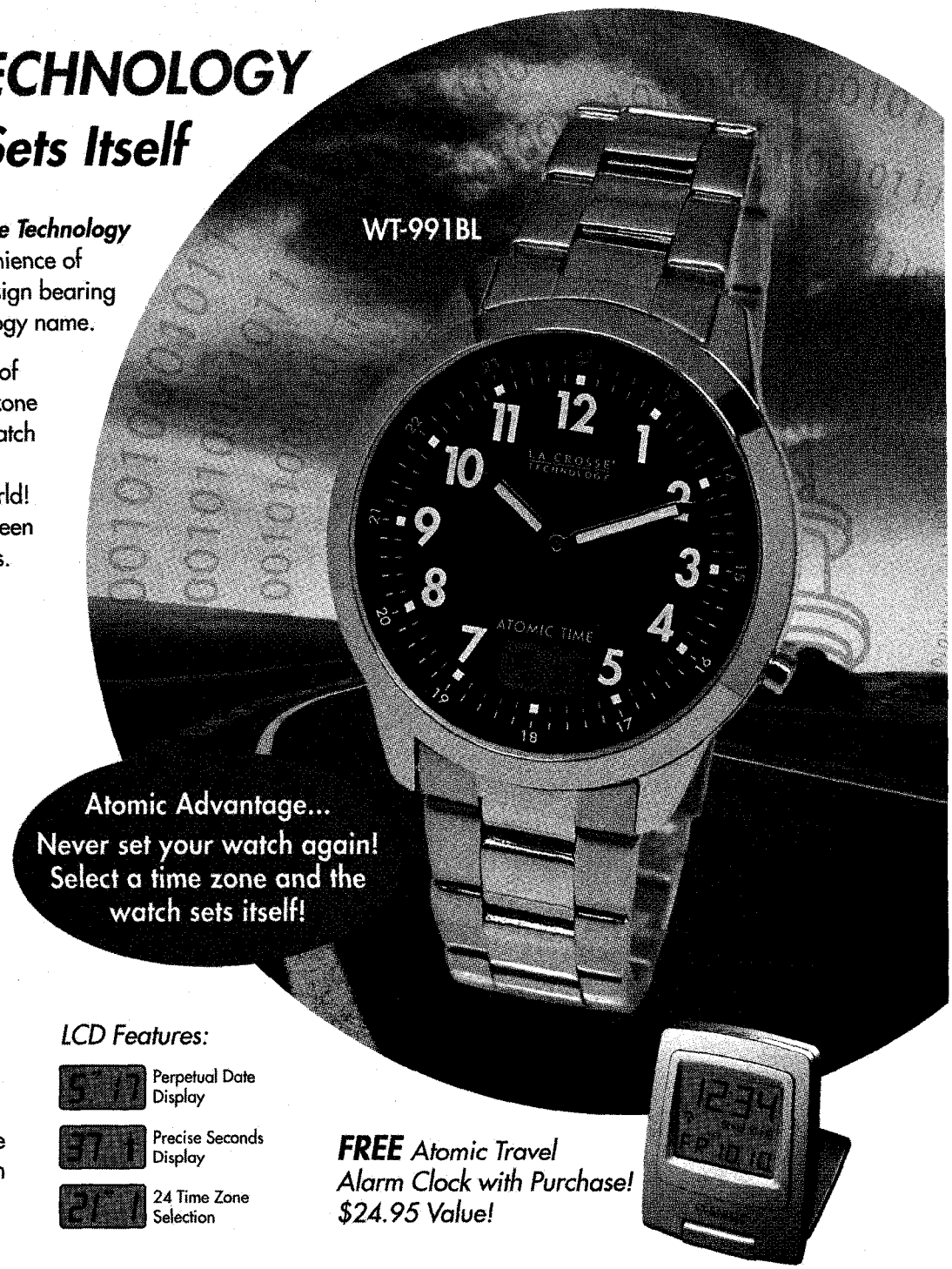

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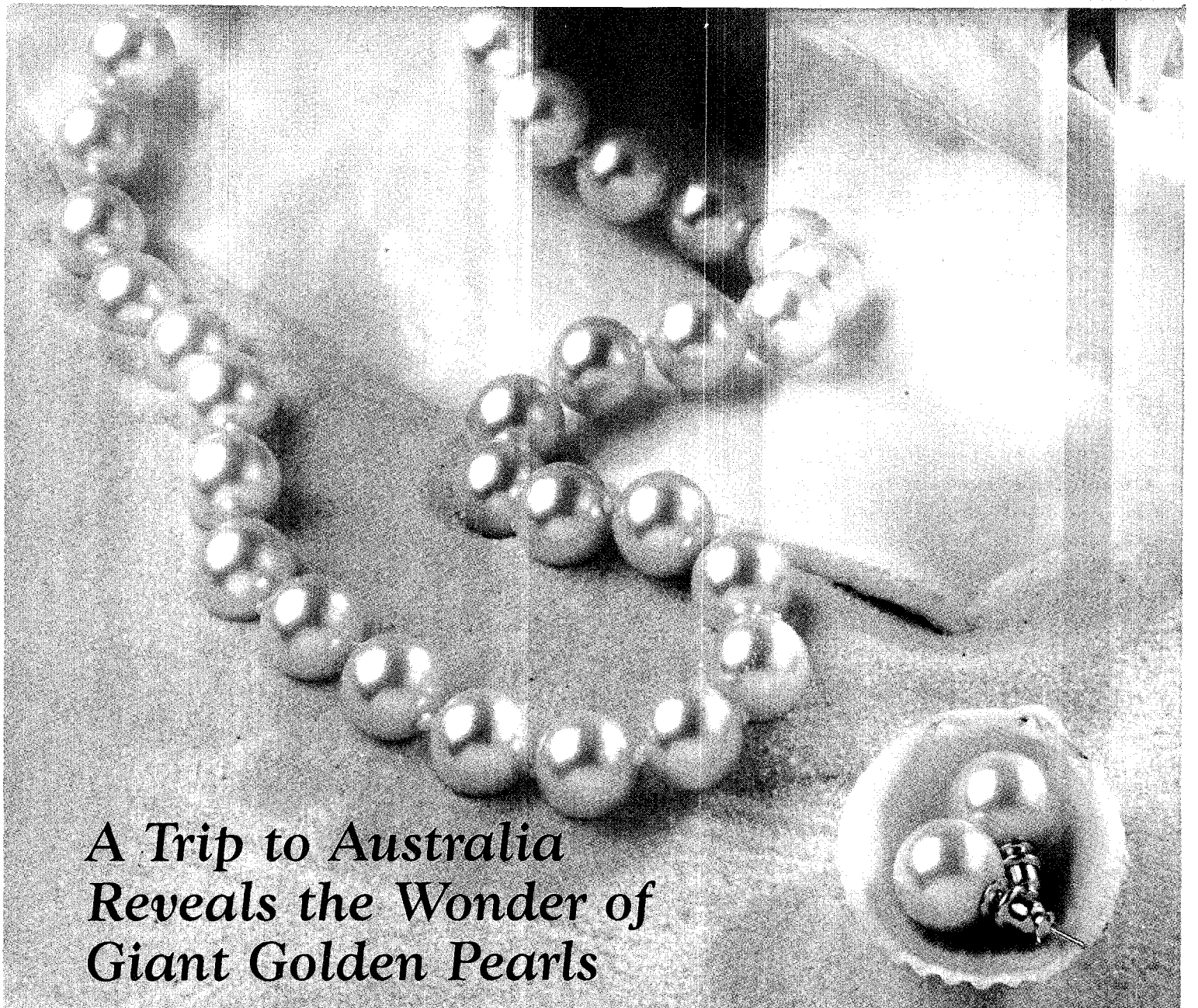

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